Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE

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A BRIEF HISTORY

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JESS FRANCO INTERVIEW

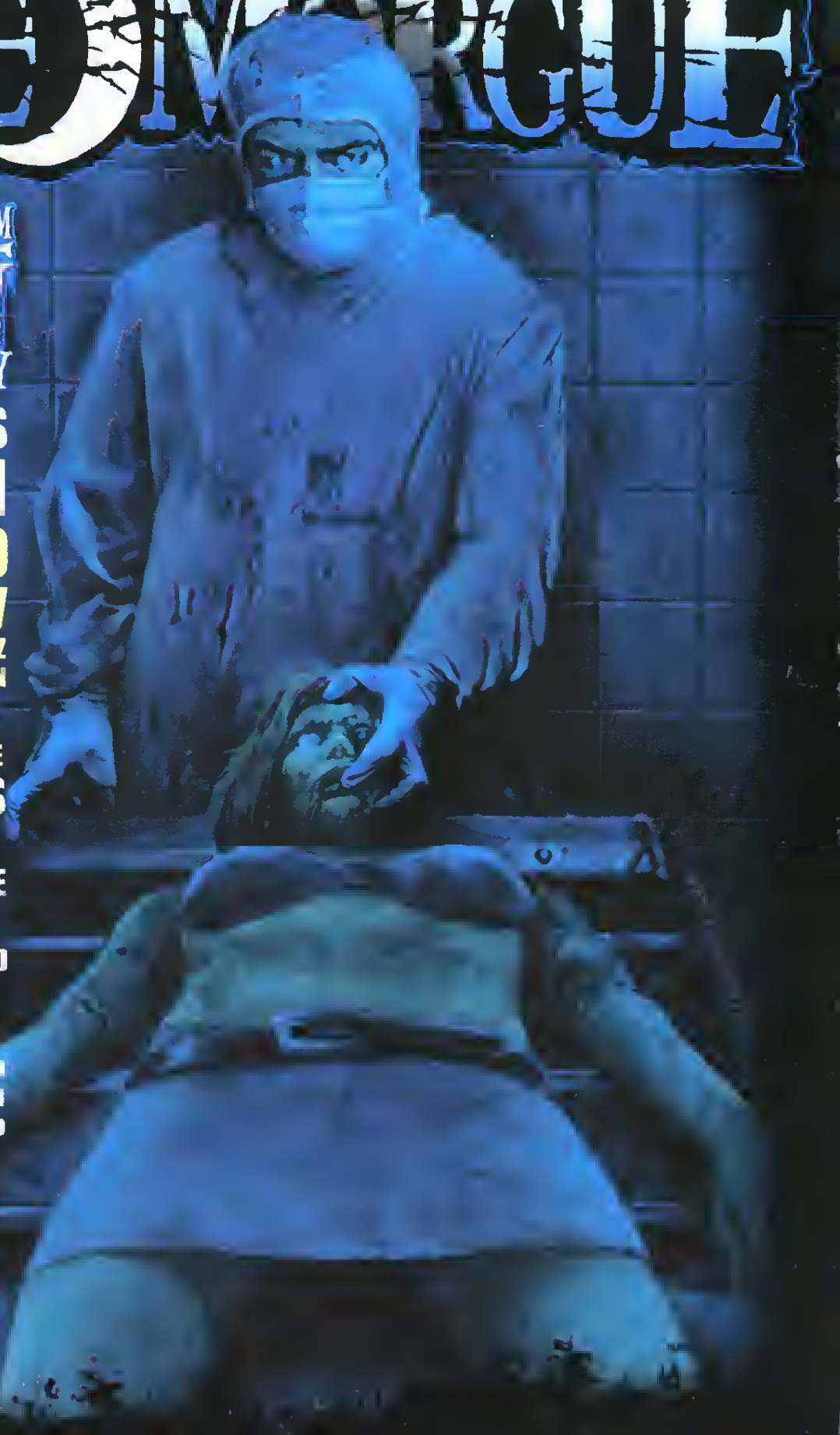
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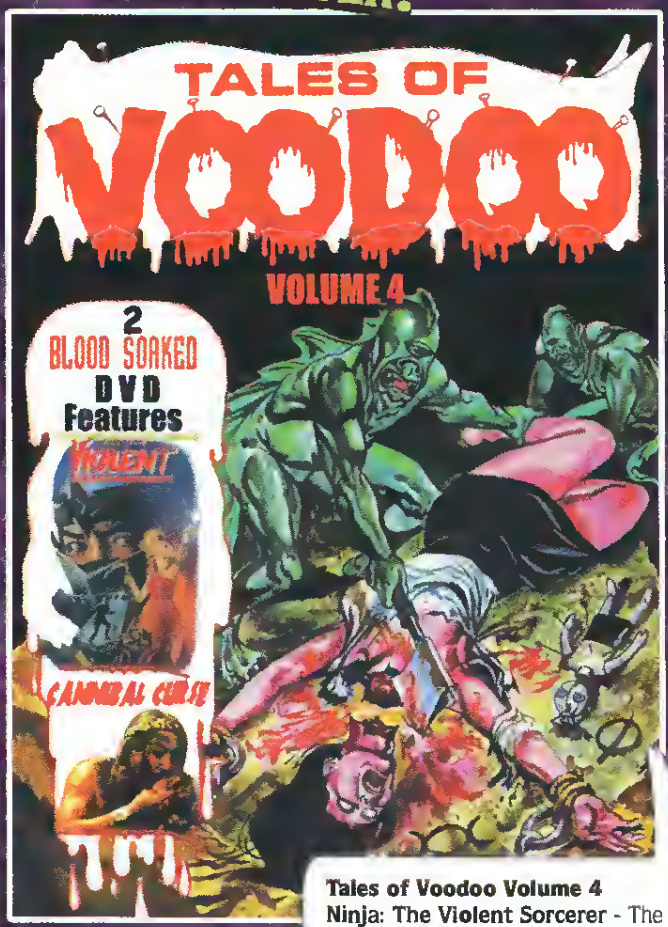
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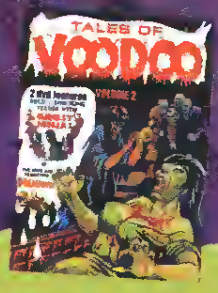
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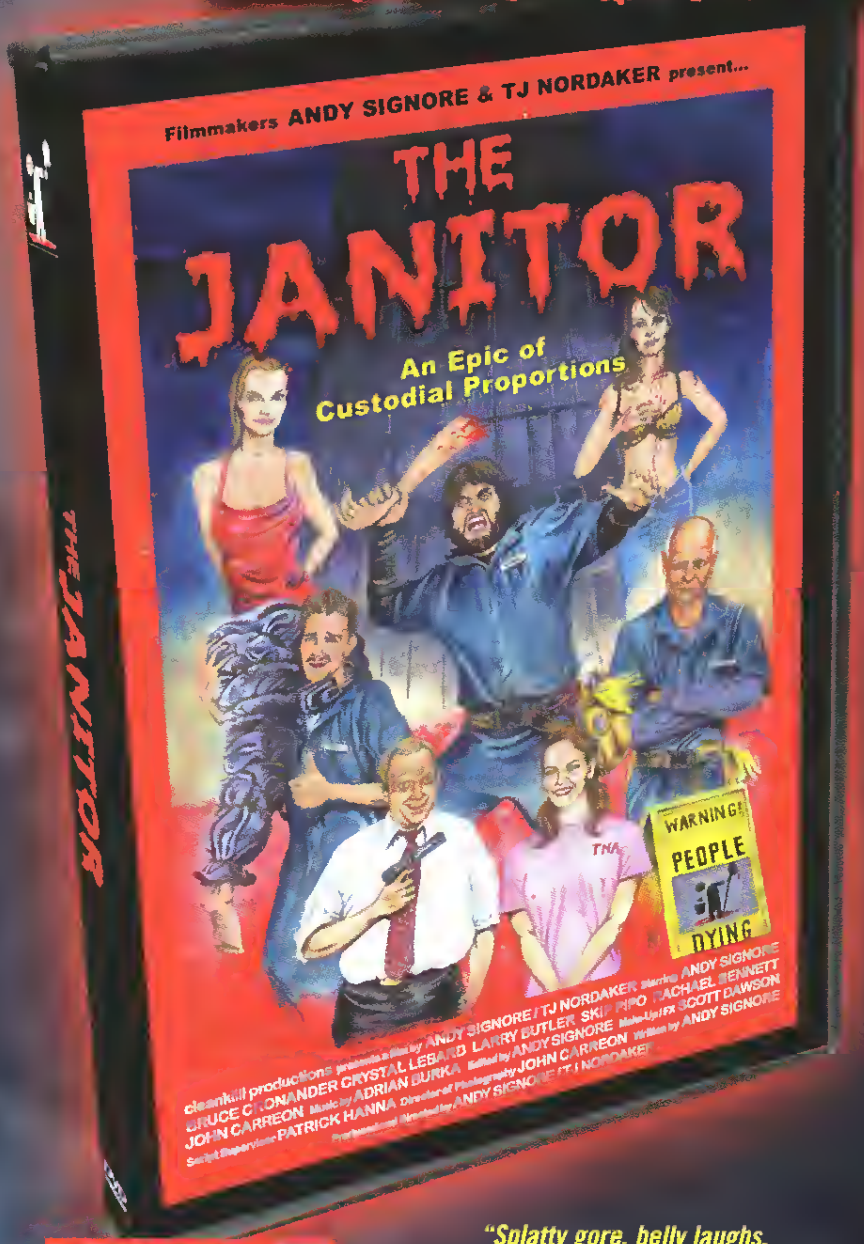
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RM's spotlight on Spain focuses on Nacho Cerda's Aftermath, a film buried in rejection and revulsion for the past ten years, that finally arrives in North America this August. Plus: Jess Franco interviewed and reviewed; the art of Robert Hernandez, a history of Hispanic Horror and much more.
by **Jovanka Vuckovic, Chris Alexander, Jay Slater, Joseph O'Brien** and **Dave Alexander**

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July 2005 Issue #47

Note From Underground



Back in 1998 I had the pleasure of sitting down with Nacho Cerda to watch the fruits of his labour. *Aftermath* – which he had completed years before – and the first issued cut of *Génesis* (and yes, it was actually a pleasure despite the visual assault that ensued). What's kind of amazing about that anecdote is that, after all this time, it's still those films we're talking about. For the record, *Aftermath* and *Génesis* are the only short films to ever make a *Rue Morgue* cover – doubly exceptional because they've made the cover twice (see *RM#7*).

Back in 1998, when I first saw those films, it felt to me then that I was looking at a whole new side of the genre. And I don't say that because *Aftermath* was some sickie flick that I knew few people would be able to sit through, but because it was obviously crafted with an eye for artistry. That its companion piece *Génesis* was a tragic, softly moving and heartfelt motion picture poem – and miles away from *Aftermath*, despite sharing a common theme – made me like the films even more. I knew then that *Aftermath* was not a modern answer to *Guinea Pig* nor was Nacho the Jörg Buttgereit of his day, even though, eleven years later, it appears he has weathered more than his share of those comparisons. Unquestionably due to the extreme, uncompromising nature of their content, both films slipped into obscurity.

But even if Nacho's films had been of a less aggressive, less extreme nature, chances are you probably would have missed them. It's the curse of the short film. In North America, for example, short films are relegated to festivals, manufactured as the calling cards for aspiring directors, a portfolio of sorts with the express purpose of catching the eye of studio executives. The more savvy among them will try to squeeze the kernel of a feature film into the short format in the hopes of generating the finances for a full-length movie, as was the case with last year's *Saw*. Mostly though, North American short films follow the knock-knock joke format of a commercial: the two-step process of set-up and punchline.

Outside of the US, things are a little different, and it seems the further you go geographically, the closer filmmakers live within other possibilities. By the time you get to Japan, for example, you have short films put together by established directors like Takashi Miike (*Ichi The Killer*) and Chan-wook Park (*Oldboy*), who are essentially making mini-features that follow complete story arcs. Their approach to short film is markedly different, as different as the short story is to the novella, or the comic book to the graphic novel.

The potential for achieving something other than a knock-knock joke is greater, of course, which may explain why some of the most memorable shorts hail from outside the US – standouts like Denmison Ramalho's *Love From Mother Only* (Brazil), Stefan Prehn and Jörg Wagner's *Forklift Driver Klaus: The First Day On the Job* (Germany), Robert Morgan's *The Cat With Hands* (UK), Miike's *The Box* (Japan), Fruit Chan's *Dumplings* (Korea), and Mitch Davis' *Divided Into Zero* (Canada). Even American filmmakers who have left a stamp on the genre with their short films are not following the North American model of the short, as Douglas Buck clearly wasn't when he made his devastating 25-minute debut *Cutting Moments*.

But perhaps there's no better example than the topic at hand, Nacho Cerdà's *Aftermath* and *Génesis*. Here are two short movies that, like the best horror films, stand the test of time. So I'm very happy to be showcasing them a second time, now that they have finally become available, happy too because it allows us to once again do what few established genre magazines would ever do: feature a short film on the cover. I hope it makes you take notice of this overlooked art form; I hope it makes you want to discover the possibilities of a short horror film, and maybe change the way you look at 90 minutes.

RG

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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE

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COVER: NACHO CERDA'S AFTERMATH
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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

NATURALLY I WAS DISAPPOINTED to find, in your latest issue, that Lisa Ladouceur's review of my new novel, *The Book of Renfield*, was so lukewarm (heavy on the luke). With this in mind, I felt your interested readers should know that Ms. Ladouceur was reviewing an uncorrected proof of the novel, which differs substantially from the final published work. The proofs were so imperfect that I was actually against my publisher submitting them to reviewers, but unfortunately, writers haven't much power in these situations. I'd like to think that at least some of Ms. Ladouceur's concerns and dissatisfactions were met and dealt with in the final stretch. As my title advises, it's not Dracula's story – but there's really not a Dracula deficiency in its pages, you need to look for his other faces. And of course my novel doesn't compare to the original, I just added a room (an inviting one, I hope) onto that venerable old house, to remind people that it's a rewarding and still-relevant place to visit.

Tim Lucas – Cincinnati, Ohio

I HAVE JUST PURCHASED the latest issue of *Rue Morgue*, and while I have not yet finished it, I can only guess that it is now trying to appeal to a lower common denominator of horror fan with its new style of "casual-speak" writing. It now seems to be more in the vein of that "classy" *Ain't It Cool* website with the onslaught of hyper-negativity and profanity that is perceived as hip by those just hitting their teens. While I may be in my mid-30s, I spend more on the horror merchandise covered and advertised in your pages than any twelve of the middle schoolers which you now seem to be targeting with your articles. If the juvenility still pervades, then *RM* may be laid to rest as far as I am concerned. Pity to lose such a treasure, but I want to remember it for the greatness that it was and not the thing that it seems to be becoming.

David Smith – Louisville, Kentucky

THE QUESTION you ask in your editorial is not the right one to ask: is it wrong to expect too much? Of course not. Re-reading the last few issues, it seems clear to me that there has evolved a sort of competition within the film reviews. The criteria for judging this contest are harshness and "turn of phrase". Infrequently, this happens at the expense of the review. It is the trap of critics from time immemorial – mental masturbation. So, the real question is: should you do anything about it? Once again, of course not. But, please don't try to justify it as some higher calling. In issue #45 there were more than 25 films reviewed by nine separate bylines. Not all of them seem to have the same lofty expectations you espouse. If a film is disappointing to you or any of your reviewers, I trust them to say so. If I don't agree, so what? But more important than any of that, if you want us to keep buying issues, we consumers had better enjoy reading the reviews. And we do. You and your staff have done well. Do not let the ghost of doubt haunt you.

Robert Byers Jr. – address withheld

Thank you for your letter. However, the point of the editorial centres on the fact that there are few positive reviews in our review section precisely because our writers espouse these "lofty expectations" you speak of (which, incidentally, aren't so lofty). The reviews aren't a lambasting contest – far from it – but when faced with a bad film, we exercise the right to creative bashing. The fact is that most horror movies coming out right now are, in our opinion, far from good.

WHILE SERVING overseas imagine my surprise when my beautiful wife sent me my renewal subscription for 05/06. *Rue Morgue* helps to keep me sane in a world of insanity (the other soldiers question that part). Also, I thought that I'd mention her displeasure in knowing that I read your magazine before letters from home, pictures of family, let alone my kids' artwork. I'm sorry that I'll miss this year's Festival of Fear. Last year my seven-year-old and I attended and had a blast. In short, the magazine is wicked. I'll keep my mind on my mission, and you keep up the amazing work on yours.

Cpl. Ryan Bannon C.E. – Golan Heights, Syria

IN HIS REVIEW of the *Clonus* DVD John W. Bowen used the phrase "the banality of evil" right before referring to the President of the United States. This phrase is the subtitle for Eichmann in Jerusalem by Arendt – I am sure Bowen knows this and that's why he used it. As an American and someone who voted for George W. Bush twice I am offended. In all honesty, I don't care one bit about Bowen's politics, no matter how uninformed they may be, but when they are thrown in my face while I'm reading a horror magazine, it bothers me.

Mike Pisani – South Huntington, New York

In his defense, John is an American citizen born in Texas, he insists that "the banality of evil is a phrase much older than any book about Eichmann which, incidentally, I've never heard of."

RE: RUE MORGUE RADIO. I downloaded it and checked it out, got through it and was surprised to hear 12 Step Rebels! I was totally dumbfounded. I now live in New York but grew up in New Mexico in the Albuquerque area and hung out with Mad Dog Chad from 12SR a lot at the our favourite clubs and bars. It was just a wonderful thing to hear some familiar voices from home. Also, I am really fucking happy about the radio station. Just wish it was longer.

Chris Bently – New York, New York

I'M THE EIRST to admit that Jess Franco's digital era films are garbage, but there was a time when the man was capable of making electrically-charged, kinetic films that vibrated with energy. Sure, he made so many films one has to sift through throwaway material to find the diamonds in the rough, but filming fast and filming constantly was how he worked, and it's not likely a stunning film like *The Devil Came From Akasava* would feel so organically alive if he had been a more deliberate, careful filmmaker. I just wish *Rue Morgue* had chosen a critic who had more respect for what Franco was capable of, rather than Chris Alexander who – in direct contradiction to his professed admiration for the man's work – dismisses him as the "archbishop of bad horror cinema." It's sad to think there are younger viewers reading *Rue Morgue* who might not give Franco a chance because of Alexander's aesthetic obtuseness.

Andrew MacEwen – Queens, New York

FOR THE LAST few months I've noticed two letters in Post Mortem about the origins of horror in hip hop. One claims the "pioneers" are Insane Clown Posse and Esham and the other claims the "Uncle Howie Goons" (Necro, Ill Bill, Hyde and Goretex). Here are the facts. Geto Boys were doing horror in hip hop in '87. Kool G Rap had also been writing horror lyrics since the mid '80s. I'm not even sure that these are the first artists to do it, I just know that horror in hip hop has been around much longer than 1995.

Jeff Melo – address withheld

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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Barker's Midnight Meat Train on track

Between comic book, television and movie adaptations, toy lines, paintings, and all new novels and short stories, Clive Barker may be the hardest working man in horror, and now one of his most anticipated projects – a movie series based on his *Books of Blood* anthologies from the '80s (see *RM#41*) – is finally on track.

Barker's Midnight Picture Show group – which includes long-time collaborators Anthony DiBlasi and Joe Daley – has brought on producer Jorge Saralegui (*Red Planet*, *Queen of the Damned*) to help make two Films of Blood per year.

"This is a long process," Barker tells *Rue Morgue* from his home in Beverly Hills, where he's working on several projects, including a new anthology of shorts and poetry called *The Scarlet Gospels*. "We're talking about five, six, seven years of making these movies. There are 30 stories in the books, and I think fifteen or sixteen of them are adaptable, and if we had a little more money that number would go up to 23 or 24."

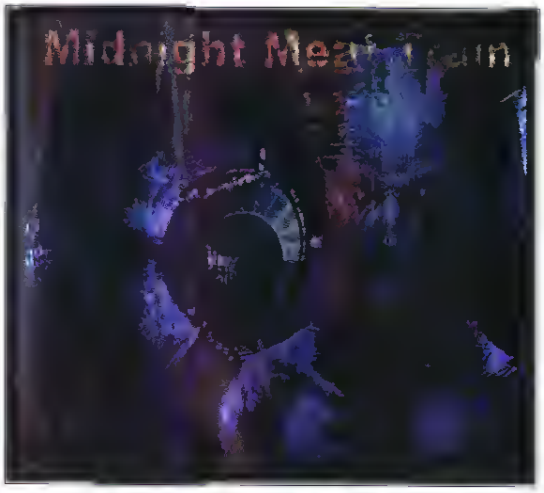
The first entry, *Midnight Meat Train*, has been adapted by newcomer Jeff Buhlerwill and will be shot this fall, financed by Lakeshore Entertainment and distributed by Lions Gate Films. The story features a commuter's run-in with a New York subway serial killer and a horde of subterranean cannibals. The project was originally to be helmed by Michael J. Bassett (*Deathwatch*), who bowed out recently for another job in the UK, and has been replaced by Patrick Tatopoulous, whose previous experience includes special effects work on *Underworld*, *Cursed*, the upcoming *Silent Hill*, and Barker's TV movie *Saint Sinner* (2002). Though *Midnight Meat Train* will be Tatopoulous' first turn in the director's chair, Barker is confident.

"The movie isn't special effects driven," he says, "but there are a lot of effects in the final reel – physical effects, not CGI effects. When they come up, they've got to be great, and Patrick has a handle on all that."

Following *Midnight Meat Train*, Midnight Picture Show plans to make *Plague*, a film about teenagers who emerge from mysterious comas and attack their parents. Hal Masonberg, whose genre credits are limited to working as a production assistant on *Demonic Toys*, will direct with Armada Pictures financing.

Other stories planned for adaptation include Age Of Desire, In The Flesh, Jacqueline Ess, The Life Of Death, The Madonna, Pig's Blood Blues and Twilight Of The Towers. Barker says he hopes to eventually direct some of the films himself. Aside from the occasional project, notably *Candyman*, and less notably *Rawhead Rex* ("a god-awful movie," says Barker) the author hung on to the *Blood* stories until the timing was right.

"I'm seeing a lot of what I'll call 'soft horror' around, and not a lot of 'hard horror' – certainly not from American [filmmakers]," he notes. "There's a lot of PG-13s and ghost/apparition kind of stuff. I've always liked my horror harder, and I thought this was a good time to say, 'Hey, we've got this body of stories, let's bring a different sensibility to horror audiences.'"



Barker promises a "different sensibility" with new films

Barker's own directorial project, *Tortured Souls: Animae Damnatae*, which was to be his first since 1995's *Lord of Illusions*, and based on the Tortured Souls figures he created for McFarlane Toys, is currently stalled because of Universal Studios' reluctance to produce extreme horror.

"I want to make *Tortured Souls* with a hard R," Barker insists. "I want it to be a vision of Hell or some other ghastly place of judgment that would be seared into the audience's imagination. I wanted to expand that whole fetishistic, dark, almost priestly world the old Barker preoccupation with religion and anti-religion. I wanted some dark religious underpinnings to the movies, and I'm pretty sure at Universal, that didn't go down too well."

Dave Alexander



Global horror comes to FanTasia 2005

Montreal's FanTasia bills itself as "North America's premier genre film festival," but with a lineup of more than 70 features, over 60 shorts and numerous guests from around the globe, the fest – now entering its ninth year – may just be the best barometer for horror happenings worldwide.

Mitch Davis, FanTasia's Director of International Programming, points out a genre shift embodied by this year's festival. "If there's any one thing the 2004-2005 period has made clear, it's that the Japanese horror wave is beginning to break with more and more films being made expressly and very safely for formalized Western export. The new trend in confrontational Japanese film is more often than not expressing itself through twisted pop pastiches like *Karaoke Terror*."

Based on the novel by Ryu Murakami (*Audition*), *Karaoke Terror* pits teenaged punks and middle-aged women against each other in brutal urban warfare. "As insane as the premise is, the film is actually a very philosophical piece of work, with a Buñuelian sense of humour," says Davis. "It's got an ending that almost makes the finale of *Fight Club* seem civic minded."

Other Japanese entries include the new Takashi Miike film *Izo*, about a damned time-traveling assassin, Takashi Shimizu's sequel to *Ju-On: The Grudge* (*RM#40*), the blood psychodrama *Neighbor #13* and *Godzilla: Final Wars*, a re-imagining of the 50-year-old series. At press time Davis was confirming *Final Wars* director Ryuhei Kitamura (*Versus*) as a guest. In addition, author Tom Mes will premiere *Iron Man* (FAB Press), his book on Japanese filmmaker Shinya Tsukamoto (*RM#45*).

Other Asian horror highlights include Thai titles *P* (a coming-of-age drama that combines exploitation and supernatural horror) and *Shutter* (a new take on the phenomena of ghost photography), as well as the South Korean dark fairy-tale film *Spider Forest*.

Spain is also strongly represented with the world premiere of *The Nun*, about the spirit of an evil nun terrorizing boarding school girls. It's the directorial debut of editor Luis De La Madrid, who's worked with Jaume Balagueró on *The Nameless* (see p. 28) and *Darkness*, Brad Anderson on *The Machinist* and Nacho Cerdà on *Genesis* (see p. 19).



Ju-On 2: *Premieres at this year's Fantasia film festival*

"We booked [*The Nun*] sight unseen based solely on all the talent behind it," says Davis, who also recommends Eugenio Mira's *The Birthday*, a Spanish Lovecraftian horror-comedy about a doomsday sect.

According to Davis, however, the best horror-comedy at this year's fest is Germany's *Night of the Living Dorks*, featuring three nerdy teens who rise from the grave and return to class.

"When I first heard the title I thought it would be a cynical *Shaun of the Dead* cash-in," he admits, "but it's a really cool, goofy and weirdly naive film that works when it probably shouldn't." In contrast, Davis says Germany's *Antibodies*, by Christian Alvart, contains the "most horrific and genuinely vile serial killer character of any film in recent memory."

The varied international flavour of the fest is further spiced by *Trouble*, a Polanski-style horror film about a long-lost identical twin, from Belgian director Harry Cleven (who will be in attendance), Delaware filmmaker Ti West's B-movie parody *The Roost* (produced by *Wendigo* director Larry Fessenden), the Canadian premieres of both the Russian vampire action-horror comedy *Night Watch* (see p 52) and Rob Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects* (see p 43), and an appearance by "The Tom Savini of Brazil" Andre Kapel.

Other guests include special effects pioneer Ray Harryhausen (introducing a new print of *Jason and the Argonauts*), comic book artist Stephen R. Bissette (presenting a slide show on the history of horror comics), and New York painter Joe Coleman (*RM#40*), who's doing a midnight multimedia show.

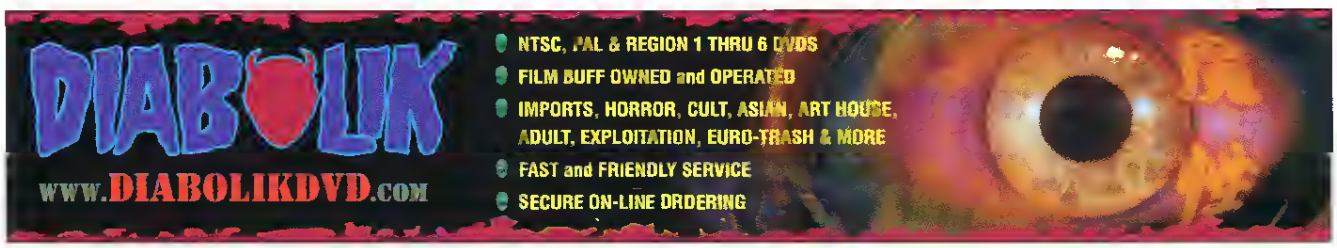
Davis' favourite FanTasia acquisition this year, though, is homegrown. Ontario filmmaker Paul Fox's horrific kidnapping story *The Dark Hours*, which he describes as "one of the most intense, well-written and cleverly directed genre films of the last year."

That said, FanTasia's most talked about film seems to be John Roeker's *Live Freaky! Die Freaky!*, an ultra-violent stop-motion animated musical short about the Manson murders, produced by Rancid's Tim Armstrong, and featuring voice work from Asia Argento, as well as members of AFI, Green Day, The Lunachicks, and The Go-Gos.

"*Freaky* is an extraordinarily offensive film that decimates all possible taboos and will anger almost everybody, but there's something very charming about it all," says Davis.

FanTasia runs from July 7 to 24 at the Concordia University Hall cinema and DeSeve Cinema. For more info and full film schedule see fantasiafest.com.

Dave Alexander



Dreadlines

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FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

www.joecapobianco.com
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www.fleshdonor.org
Sure organ donation is old news, but this bizarre Ontario, Canada-based initiative seeks to take it to an entirely new level, providing "donated" human flesh meals as a consentual alternative to consuming animals. Includes a step-by-step guide to preparing a human corpse for consumption. Dig in!

www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets
This fascinating website launched by PBS in support of their series *Secrets of the Dead*, takes historical events, crimes and supernatural locales, like the Salem Witch hysteria and Stonehenge, and applies modern science and forensic techniques to investigate them.

www.skinbag.net/skinbag-gb/index.html
A French fashion company turns haute couture, quite literally, into faux human flesh couture. These creepy bags, garments and accessories are constructed out of somewhat realistic-looking fake people skin and can be ordered with personalized "tattoos". For fatal fashionistas only.

www.witchschool.com
Cauldrons, potions and portents, oh my! Witch School not only boasts more online courses – in the Correllian Wicca tradition – than you could shake a broomstick at, it also has two physical locations in the US. Cast a spell today.



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Savini stars in new Romero zombie game

When it comes to killing, playing and creating the undead, you'd be hard pressed to find anyone as prolific as filmmaker/actor/gore effects wiz Tom Savini, so it's as natural as rigor mortis that he'd expand his zombie resume to include video games. Next spring the horror movie veteran will be blowing away pixilated flesh as a featured character in *George A Romero's City of the Dead*, a survivor zombie shooter game developed by Kuju Entertainment (in conjunction with Hip Games) for the PC, Xbox, and PlayStation 2.



A Savini-eye view of George A. Romero's ***City of the Dead***

"You can be one of four survivors who are trying to make it on this island with all these zombies," says Savini, describing the plot of the game, which takes place in Romero's *Dead* universe. "I'm this ex-military guy survivalist who comes out and helps them because I have these weapons and a cache of ammo. It's the goriest, bloodiest video game on the market they tell me, which explains why I'm in it."

While filming his part in Romero's latest zombie film, *Land of the Dead*, Savini was approached by Hip to be featured as battle-worn Red MacLean. He initially appears midway though the story to aid players trying to survive an onslaught of the undead who've escaped from a military base, and eventually can be unlocked as a playable character.

"It's almost like something from *Final Fantasy*, it's so real," explains Savini. "They also sent me sketches of my attire, knee pads and an M-16 with an axe on the end of it, grenades all over the place and guns sticking out. I'm a lot more buff in it; they captured my tattoos and my earrings. It looks pretty damn good."

Armed with both futuristic and conventional weapons, players battle through a variety of abandoned locales. *City of the Dead* also features split-screen co-op missions, four-player online capability, and the option to enter the fray as a zombie, going (rotten) toe-to-toe with the humans.

Savini, who owns several consoles and admits a penchant for *Mortal Kombat* and *Doom*, plans to be involved with the *City of the Dead* at a structural level, as well.

"I'm actually gonna consult with [the developers] – from what they tell me – on the action, on how to gloriously kill lots of zombies, because that's what I do," he laughs.

Not one to rest on his on living dead laurels, he's also in the process of pitching his own original zombie script. The story, which he wrote and hopes to direct as well as act in, is called *Death Island*. Its premise has a film crew trapped on an island where they're picked off by zombies.

"It's a unique treatment," Savini says. "It goes back to the Haitian voodoo zombie, the old *White Zombie* kinda thing. It's eye candy, not *28 Days Later* or Romero or anything. That's the one I'm pitching because you know, zombies are big again – this is the time of zombies."

Dave Alexander



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THE CORONER'S REPORT 13

Weird Stats Morbid Facts

✝ The word "lycanthrope" has its origins in Greek mythology. In the legend, King Lycaon of Acadia makes an offering to Zeus in the form of a meal of human flesh. Zeus is displeased by this and turns Lycaon into a wolf.

✝ In the 1600s, the French colony of Quebec and the English colonies located in New England were both paying their Native Indian allies for scalps of the enemy. The average amount paid per scalp was $15.

✝ In *Poltergeist*, the hands that rip the paranormal investigator's face off in the bathroom mirror belong to producer Steven Spielberg.

✝ There are several tribes in Africa who believe that crocodiles are vehicles of revenge, housing the souls of those who have been murdered.

✝ Edgar Allan Poe's short story The Black Cat is thought to be the most-filmed short tale in history.

✝ Only five to fifteen deaths result from the 70 to 100 shark attacks that occur each year, while annually bee stings account for over 6000 fatalities.

✝ In the 1980s, Donald Pleasence (*Halloween*) was cited by *Variety* as being the "busiest actor in the world."

✝ In 1800s Upper Canada there were 120 different crimes that were punishable by death.

✝ Wes Craven is the only top-tier horror director who has not adapted a Stephen King story.

✝ On the island of Sardinia an illegal but oft-consumed delicacy is casu marzu, made from pecorino cheese that has been left out in the sun to attract flies that lay their larvae in it. The treat is eaten after the maggots have hatched and digested the cheese leaving behind an enzyme that triggers the much-desired fermentation process.

✝ *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies* is credited with being the horror film with the longest title. It was also promoted as "The first ever monster musical."

✝ In September 2003, gaming company White Wolf Inc. and horror author Nancy A. Collins filed a suit against the trio of companies behind the film *Underworld* for seventeen counts of copyright infringement in relation to their *Vampire: The Masquerade* and *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* RPGs.

✝ The candirú, a form of parasitic catfish that gets its sustenance from the blood of other fish and mammals, is capable of swimming up the urethra of a human male where it can burrow in and permanently lodge itself using claw-like protrusions before settling in for the feast.

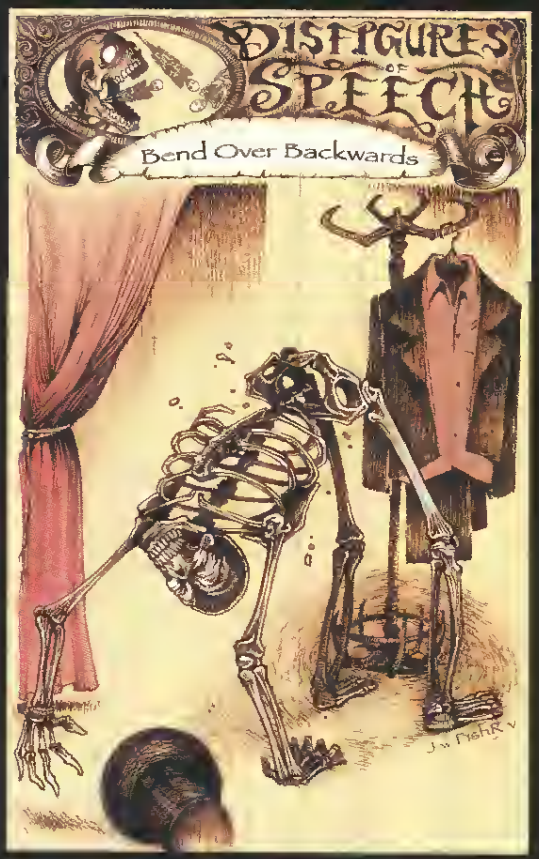
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The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX

Instances of PENILE DETACHMENT



1. Cannibal Ferox
 Purloined pigmy penile platter.
2. Subconscious Cruelty
 Post-ejaculation rod annihilation.
3. Nekromantik 2
 Monika's necro knob rob.
4. I Spit On Your Grave
 Vengeful bathtub vein drain.
5. The Last House on the Left
 Weasel's dismembered member.
6. Night of the Demon (1980)
 Bigfoot's biker phallus malice.



" ... a thoroughly creepy exercise in psychological terror" – *BBC Films*

From Director **Hideo Nakata** (Ringu & The Ring 2)
And Writer **Kôji Suzuki** (Entire Ringu Series)



(HONOGURAI MIZU NO SOKO KARA)

Recently divorced, and caught in a bitter custody battle with her ex-husband, Yoshimi Matsubara (Hitomi Kuroki) moves into an apartment with her 5-year old daughter Ikuko (Asami Mizukawi). When the ceiling of the apartment starts to leak uncontrollably, Yoshimi's life begins to unravel, she becomes obsessed with a missing girl who used to live upstairs, Ikuko gets a mystery illness, feet can be heard running about on the deserted floor above and there is something not right about the tap water. Soon the building seems to be bursting at the seams with the terrible secret it contains.



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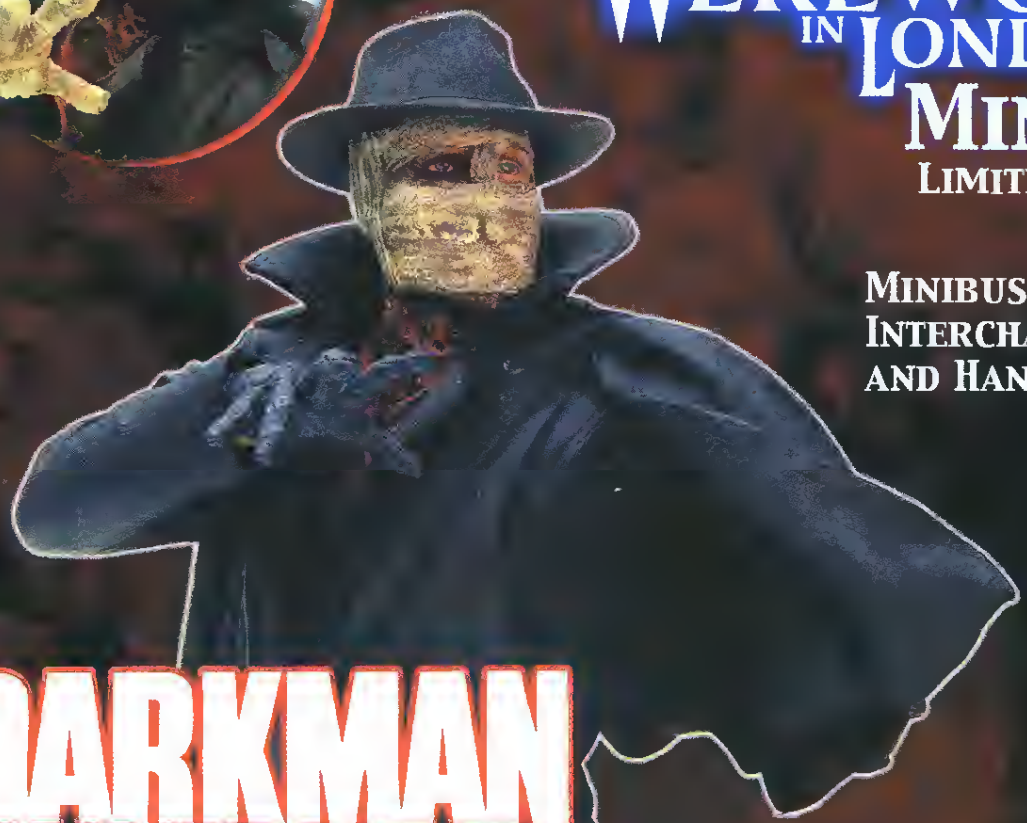




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Recently, Spain has produced some remarkable horror films, but none as remarkable as NACHO CERDÀ'S *AFTERMATH*. Buried in rejection and revulsion for the past ten years, Cerdà's film finally arrives in North America this August, courtesy of Unearthed Films.

EYE ON SPAIN

Traces of DEATH

by Jovanka Vuckovic

True, death is *a* central concept to most horror films, but many genre pics prefer to toy with the concept, to flavour it with boogeymen and monsters. But what of a movie that is so terribly authentic that all sense of entertainment is flushed – like so much coagulated blood – down the drain? Such is Nacho Cerdà's ***Aftermath***, an eleven-year-old movie that does in 30 cold minutes what most films can't do in 90.

Lensed back in 1994, ***Aftermath*** is a staggering meditation on the indignities of death and the depravity of bodily corruption. It's a film that is unique to the genre because it confronts a subject that is customary to horror, but does so with sobering realism and artistic vigor – *a* visceral masterpiece that few have seen or will even want to see.

The second in a thematically-linked independent trilogy of shorts, ***Aftermath*** depicts, in extremely graphic detail, human bodies at the mercy of a soulless, anonymous morgue employee – a skilled butcher played by Spanish theatre veteran Pep Tosar – who performs a very unusual autopsy on the cadaver of a woman once named Marta. Unlike Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed* (1996), ***Aftermath*** (shot on a budget of $35,000) doesn't attempt to romanticize death, nor is it an exploration of the sexual fetishization of the dead à la Jörg Buttgereit's *Nekromantik* films. Instead, it offers a clinical view of the reality of death and our worst fears regarding the fate of our discarded bodies.

For many, ***Aftermath*** is an impossible movie to watch – even for horror cineastes, some of whom lambasted the film after its initial festival runs, not to mention distribution companies who avoided it like roadkill in the hot summer sun. But where ***Aftermath*** diverges from the "gorenography" canon (which it has been accused of belonging to) is in Cerdà's obvious artistry.

Four years later, in 1998, Cerdà followed ***Aftermath*** with ***Génesis*** (see sidebar p.19), a poetic, haunting, dialogue-free story about surviving death. Because it sidesteps the excessive gore of its predecessor, ***Génesis*** is Cerdà's most accessible film, made deliberately to showcase his abilities as a filmmaker and to tie off his "death-themed" films for good. But due to its association with ***Aftermath***, and its abstract, nonlinear narrative, the film did little to advance Cerdà's career, so it sat alongside its nastier, older brother collecting dust. Until now.

After eleven years in the dark, Unearthed Films, a North American DVD distribution company with a fearless reputation for releasing extreme cult movies, has acquired ***Aftermath***, along with its counterparts ***The Awakening*** (Cerdà's *Twilight Zone*-like 1991 student film about an out of bod experience) and ***Génesis***, for release in North America for the first time.

The ***Aftermath*** special edition DVD features new 1.85:1 widescreen transfers of ***Aftermath*** and ***Génesis*** in Dolby 5.1, ***The Awakening*** short, commentaries with Cerdà, a *Making of Aftermath* featurette, a Nacho Cerdà interview by Jörg Buttgereit, storyboards, production photos, scripts and more.

Rue Morgue speaks with Cerdà remotely from Bulgaria just as he's about to begin shooting his first full-length feature film *Bloodline*, financed by Spanish horror production company Filmax.





Cerdà explains how to properly separate a sternum during the filming of ***Aftermath.***

"[*Aftermath*] is difficult to watch and very graphic, but it had to be, because that is the reality of death." - *Nacho Cerdà*

Why has it taken so long for these films to finally be released on DVD?
One of the reasons is that I didn't really have any interesting offers come my way. The other reason is that it was a real project; I had to do a new Telecine transter now that DVD has become a huge thing. I always had that in mind but never had the time or the money to do it on my own so I just waited it out and finally got this offer from North America.

Did you originally conceive of these films as a trilogy or did it kind of happen along the way?
It's really funny because it just happened; I never really intended to make them linked. *The Awakening* was a result of a 16mm filmmaking project done with other students at UFC, it was never meant to be the first chapter of a trilogy. Then *Aftermath* came along and I noticed it had a lot to do with the theme I had explored in my first film, and at one point I thought I might even close this chapter, and that's where *Génesis* came in. It was four years after *Aftermath* and I wanted to do another short film, and I was playing with ideas. After I wrote it I thought: "Wait a minute, this is the third chapter!" [Laughs]

Explain how the theme of death functions throughout the trilogy.
In *The Awakening* death appears in the form of the soul or conscience separating from the body. In *Aftermath* I am dealing with the physical part of death, and the third film, *Génesis*, is more about the people who are left alone as a result of death. I never kept the same format either; the first one was 16mm, the second was 35mm and the third was 1:85 cinemascope, so I took a technically different approach to each film. The fact that they are being released together now is interesting because, for the first time, people will be able to see the evolution and compare them.

Your student film* The Awakening *is the most raw of the three. Are you still comfortable including it with the other two, more evolved, films?
Like you said, it's a student film. I did it when I was 21 so it's really included as a curiosity on the discs for people who want to take a look at it. For me the two most important, of course, are *Aftermath* and *Génesis*.

Aftermath ***is without a doubt the most extreme of the three films, do you think you could have made it so powerful without being so extreme about it?***
I don't think so. At that time I was full of rage. I was only 23 when I made it; I would never make a film so radical and graphic now. I've seen other films portray this theme in a much more subtle and elegant way, but still I tried to combine the violence and graphicness with a little bit of style. But the violence, I think, was entirely necessary. I've always believed in being shocked when I go to the cinema. I think that there's no middle ground with that. If I go to see a horror film I want to be scared; if I go to see a comedy I want to laugh. [*Aftermath*] is one thing in my life that I just had to do. Every subject requires a certain approach, if not, you're not being honest. I'm not saying it's right to make movies like that, but it was necessary. In the end, I don't think I would have done anything differently, I think it's right the way it was done but that doesn't mean I would do it again.

Do you think* Aftermath *helped your career?
Not at all. When it came out everybody was very scandalized.

How did you acquire the financing for something so unconventional and gruesome?
Nobody would shoot a 30-minute short like this back then. They were all twelve to 25 minutes with dialogue, like a feature, so I decided I would just do it myself. I remember my DOP [Chris Baff] had certain issues about one particular shot that he refused to shoot.

The rape of the corpse?
Yeah, but specifically the scene where the pathologist stabs the corpse in the vagina. We only kept three or four frames of the shot and we cut to an over-the-shoulder so it's a little bit offscreen if you take a look at it. But our DOP refused to shoot it and so I did it myself. For me it was necessary at that point.



Cadaver Craft: *"The corpses are the real stars of the movie," says Cerdá.*

Why was it necessary to defile a corpse in an autopsy setting?
It represents the total humiliation of a human body. I figured no one was going to care anyway since it wasn't a commercial film. I had a great deal of freedom to do whatever I wanted with my movie. I told everyone to just do the scene and not to worry about it, that it was my problem.

Where did the idea for* Aftermath *come from?
I remember the day. It came to me in February of 1994. I was in Los Angeles; it was right after [a] terrible event in my life and I was sitting alone and thinking: "I want to go home and make a film about someone who is fucking a corpse."

Was that supposed to be cathartic for your pent up rage?
[Laughs] Well, I was angry at life, and that was my first reaction. But before I began, I thought about it and decided to also make it about an autopsy, with a clinical, scientific approach. I didn't want to make it up, I wanted to learn how an autopsy was done and do it right. So I called a woman I knew who was a doctor and she invited me to observe several autopsies. Then I wrote the first half of the script based on that and, of course, the second half based on what I intended to do in the first place – which was: what is it like to rape a dead human body? And *Aftermath* is how it all came out.

Do you think your message about the indignity of death is properly received by viewers or is it more often received as a gore film?
It is more often received as a gore film, I'm not going to deny that. It is gory, of course, it's a film that definitely has a radical way of showing things, but if you get over that there is an underlying theme of solitude, and what it means to be dead, what it means to not exist any more, to finish your life, your experience of living – that was really more my concern.

In fact, the reality of an autopsy is much, much worse than what you depicted.
It is! Exactly. I actually left out a lot of what I saw at those horrible autopsies. People are not used to this and they don't want to see it, but for me it was a way to exorcise my own fears. I don't know if it's ever happened to you but people tend to internalize things and I don't want to do that because if I don't have someone to talk to, I can get sick. So for me, communicating those fears becomes like a medicine, an antidote. When you communicate with people – whether it's through a movie or a piece of writing – you feel like you're part of something and that's good for the soul. That's why I made this movie.

How did Spanish audiences respond to* Aftermath *compared to other countries?
This film has become much more appreciated overseas than in my own country. Spanish culture is a little different from Anglosaxon culture; [Spaniards] are so used to death in their culture that they don't really care. Some were scandalized but most were like, "Whatever." But in the States, everyone's response was, "Wow, that's hardcore." And it is, actually.

What were you really trying to say with that corpse-rape scene?
Again, it's about the humiliation of the human body. The first half of the movie involves the humiliation of a male corpse and the second half was a female, which wasn't really intentional. Some people have even accused the film of being misogynistic because the character rapes a dead female body.

Ah, but a corpse is a corpse, I think those people are missing the point.
Yeah, it's a dead human, that's the point. It doesn't matter whether it's a male or a female, the fact is, it was once a person – a human being. I intentionally tried to humanize those corpses because they are what is important. I deliberately didn't show the doctor's faces and shot as many close-ups of the corpses as I could. I was trying to get as much life as I could from whatever they had left. When I saw those three real corpses in the morgue autopsies I attended the first thing I thought was: "What are these people feeling now?" This was someone who loved, cried, laughed, ate, and it was very shocking for me to see something that was once a human being now just an object. It was unforgettable, and this was my way of trying to portray all that on film.

Was there any backlash from the death industry in Spain as a result of the film?
No, never. But I remember dropping by the mortuary where we shot *Aftermath* a couple of years ago and I was speaking with some of the people that worked there and apparently a few of them didn't really like the fact that the movie was shot there. [Laughs]

Are you afraid of dying, Nacho?
I am afraid of not living enough! Dying is dying, but dying without accomplishing something... that's sad.



"[*Aftermath* and *Génesis*] are so different, but if you take a look at them, they are about the same thing – they are about stillness, they are about loneliness."

- Nacho Cerdà



Looking back on* Aftermath *now, do you think you maybe went too far with it?
I'm comfortable with it. I'm not embarrassed by it, but when people want to see my work I tend to show them *Génesis* first [laughs].

With* Génesis *you totally switched gears, it's a very positive film. Did you feel the need to redeem the kind of feelings you were exploring with* Aftermath*?
Yes, that's completely true. It was like a dead-end street, I had nothing else I wanted to say about the subject of death from that particular vantage point. *Génesis* was the result of having done something that was so radical and, for some people, difficult to get into that I had to resort to other means to tell a story. It's like an omelette; I had to flip it over. *Aftermath* was also difficult to watch for industry people, so if I wanted to get any kind of job I would have to show my abilities with a different style, so I decided to not be so graphic with things.

How was* Génesis *received?
It's the same subject matter from a different perspective, *Génesis* had to live up to *Aftermath*, which was very stressful, so I wanted to get away from that regardless of what people would think about it. I am aware that some people who love *Aftermath* hate *Génesis* and vice versa, and then there are people like you who appreciate both. They are so different, but if you take a look at them, they are about the same thing: they are about stillness, they are about loneliness. It's no coincidence that the interaction between two human beings in those two movies is separated by the fact that one of them is still. Not moving. And the other one is trying to get some sort of feedback from it.

Are you finished with the theme of death now?
That's a funny question because *Bloodline*, the movie I am about to shoot, concerns death. [Laughs] But it also deals with family and death as the only way of being immortal – to be united in death. It's a much more narrative film, more straightforward. Since I am not producing it I had to resort to a much more linear type of filmmaking. Still, I think the story is quite original.

It's a ghost story, correct?
Yes, it's about a woman who is a film producer and she's called to her homeland of Russia because she has inherited the deed to a property that has just come out of being lost. This woman, who has never met her real parents, travels to Russia for this, the only clue to what might have happened to her parents. She inherits this farm and ends up isolated in this compound and finds another person who has been brought in by the same circumstances who turns out to be her brother, whom she has never met. So they try to find out what the hell is going on and, in the process, they find something else in the house, something alive.



Sounds like a departure from your earlier style.
That's true. It's a straight-up horror story, very scary and meant to entertain people, not much like my shorts. However, it was originally written by Karim Hussain [*Subconscious Cruelty*] and I rewrote it with Richard Stanley [*Hardware*] so it's pretty graphic. Kind of like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* meets *Ringu* in terms of style and subject matter, respectively.

All of us at* Rue Morgue *have been dying to see what you'll do with your first feature film.
Now *that* scares me! [Laughs]

DEATH BECOMES HIM

GÉNESIS

Starring Pep Tosar and Trae Houlihan
Written and directed by Nacho Cerdà
Unearthed Films

Nacho Cerdà's third installment in his thematically linked trilogy of "death" shorts premiered in North America at the FanTasia Film Festival in 1998 to a stunned crowd. Viewers expecting the kind of undignified, necrophilic trauma that *Aftermath* (1994) offered were instead subjected to 30 minutes of a different kind of trauma – that of intense emotional suffering and the depth of human desperation. It's far less bloody, but no less profound.

Cerdà's first film *The Awakening* (1990) explores the first step in the process of dying – actual physical death – and *Aftermath*, as extreme an example, deals with the painful reality of what happens to the body after death. But *Génesis* (as its title would suggest) isn't so much about dying as it is about living, or rather, living after death.

Veteran theatre actor Pep Tosar – his appearance deliberately altered to not be equated with the depraved corpse-defiler from *Aftermath* – stars as an anguished sculptor who loses his wife in a terrible accident. Shortly after he carves a beautiful effigy of her, it begins to bleed from a mysterious wound below its left clavicle. The sculptor, in his desperation to give her life, begins to open wounds on his own body in an abstract attempt to offer his life for hers. As she begins to take on characteristics of the living, the artist slowly decays.

This is Cerdà at his most thoughtful, exploring the mystery of life after death. Now available on DVD for the first time as an extra on Unearthed Films' release of *Aftermath*, *Génesis* is a touching metaphysical love story about a truly tortured soul that carves right into the heart. It functions as an esoteric companion to the harsh realism of *Aftermath* and is also the filmmaker's most visually poetic effort to date. Like Cerdà's other work, *Génesis* is completely devoid of dialogue; instead, it's dressed with a rich body of moving classical music powerful enough to draw tears. It's a truly eerie and beautiful silent film that speaks volumes.

Jovanka Vuckovic



Cited as the Catholic church's second most dangerous Spanish filmmaker along with surrealist Luis Buñuel, JESS FRANCO can be considered one of the world's most prolific filmmakers... and perhaps the world's most perverted.
Rue Morgue **catches up with the tireless 75-year-old man who almost single-handedly created the sub-genre we lovingly call Eurotrash.**

EYE ON SPAIN

Spain's Sweet Sadist

by Chris Alexander

No single artist in the blood-spattered history of horror culture has garnered more controversy, ignited such debate and disdain nor such fervent admiration as Spanish-born exploitation filmmaker Jess Franco. Born Jesus Franco Manera in 1930 in Madrid, he initially trained as a musician before setting his sights on motion pictures in the late '50s. At one point studying under legendary cinema auteur Orson Welles, Franco eventually achieved his own notoriety with a string of early '60s surrealist erotic horror French co-productions like ***The Awful Dr. Orloff*** and ***The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus***. These beautiful, haunting films encapsulated Europe's moody move toward the Gothic thriller, albeit laced with liberal doses of graphic sex and then-shocking violence.

Unlike the lush, slick works of Mario Bava (*RM#30*) or the brash colour films of Britain's Hammer Studios, Franco's output was leering, voyeuristic and dreamy, feeling more like lazy post-coital orchestral arrangements than actual movies.

As the decade progressed, Franco continued to find fame outside his native Spain, working extensively in Germany, France and England, and churning out increasingly risqué cinematic ventures. Films like the delirious sex shocker ***Succubus*** (1968), the sleazy potboiler ***The Devil Came from Akasava*** (1971), the women-in-prison epic ***99 Women*** (1969) and even a so-called "faithful" adaptation of Bram Stoker's ***Dracula*** (1970) firmly positioned Franco as a consistently reliable, inventive and edgy exploitation filmmaker.

In 1970 Franco unleashed his magnum opus, ***Vampyros Lesbos***, starring his long-time muse, the stunning Portuguese starlet Soledad Miranda (***She Killed in Ecstasy***) as a vein-tapping sapphic bloodsucker. The film did so well in Germany that Miranda and Franco were signed to a multi-picture deal with Berlin-based producer Artur Brauner, but sadly Miranda was killed in an auto accident en route to the studio. So shaken was Franco with the loss of his protégé, that his work almost immediately changed.

For the next two decades Franco enjoyed an insanely prolific period of filmmaking, churning out nearly 200 movies under as many pseudonyms; his films became more personal and even less structured, filled with an even greater urgent erotic longing and violent voyeuristic intent. Despite their abundance, Franco's films remained relatively obscure until the mid-'80s, when the home video boom introduced the rest of the world to his sleazoid vision. North American horror-sleaze fans fell under his spell, and a worldwide, near-rabid cult of decadent filmgoers began the considerable task of tracking down the complete Jess Franco oeuvre.

Thanks to sleaze archivists like Blue Underground – who recently reissued two of his best films, ***Venus In Furs*** and ***99 Women*** (see sidebar) – and Image Entertainment with their new ***Jess Franco Collection*** box set (see pg. 23), the filmmaker's epics of sex and sadism are now more available than ever.

Through the aid of an interpreter, *Rue Morgue* finally catches up with Franco and discovers that beneath all the blood, breasts and body fluids – separate from the murder, cannibalism and depravity – beats the heart of a simple, sweet romantic.





*Soledad Miranda in **Female Vampire**, and a Spanish poster for **Virgin Among the Dead***

"Pornography can be an art. Who says it can't?" Jess Franco

You were of a generation of European filmmakers who were breaking taboos by blending graphic sex and violence in your films. This obviously relegated many of your more thoughtful works to the grindhouse and porn markets overseas, and gave you a certain notoriety. Are you comfortable with this reputation?

I find myself very comfortable in my skin and I love my work. If there's a minority who doesn't like me, too bad for them.

Your work blurs the lines between art and pornography, where does one end and the other begin?

Pornography can be an art. Who says it can't?

In the 1970s the Catholic church cited you as the second most dangerous Spanish filmmaker, right behind master surrealist Buñuel. How did that affect your career?

In the '70s the Vatican cited me along with Luis Buñuel as the most dangerous for Catholic morality. On the one hand, this title was very negative for me in [dictator] Franco's Spain, but since Franco's Spain was for me a cumulation of injustices and ignorances, it didn't profoundly affect me, especially since I was never a director of Spanish movies, but of French ones, English ones and American ones. There were many people who also became interested in my movies as a result of the negative publicity from the Vatican – the first was Buñuel. But my films have never been dangerous. In all of them the essential element is always love – all types. Hate is dangerous, but not love.

What do you mean when you say that you were never a director of Spanish films?

I've actually made very few films of Spanish nationality and even those are completely independent and do not correspond to Spanish cinema.

Why do you use so many different pseudonyms?

I have used and still use some pseudonyms, not for any artistic reasons, but so that my name will not appear repeatedly in all the production and exhibition credits all over the world. Stupid me! I never imagined that my work would become notorious and that the cinephiles would search for my films with the meticulousness of authentic police investigations. In any case, I have recently read some of the pseudonyms that my fans or my detractors have given me and I've had to laugh at the news that I am Pierre Chevalier – Jean Cocteau's assistant director before I was even born – or Daniel J. White, the Scottish composer who resides in Paris and author of many essays on Edith Piaf and of *Belle et Sebastien*, who was very well known before I came into the world. I mention these names – very esteemed and admired by me – only as an example of the ignorance and stupidity that has always revolved around me with respect to my work.

Does it bother you that your films are retitled and recut for different markets?

It bothers me and it really busts my balls that my films are cut or retitled by certain international merchants, but unfortunately the films belong to their producers and their buyers. The creators have no say in this. The only thing that is permitted to us is to withdraw our names (as in the case of Alan Smithee in the USA).

Do you believe cinema is more an art form or a product?

I believe that the cinema is an artistic spectacle, less important than Velazquez' *La Meninas* or Picasso's *Guernica* and less transcendental than many pedants pretend they are. It is a show.

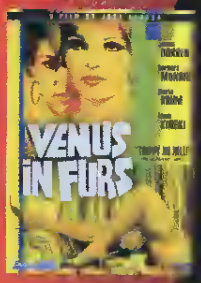
***You're a trained jazz musician, first and foremost, and some of your best films* – Venus In**

No one does psychosexual horror quite like Jess Franco. Two new reissues from Blue Underground illustrate the finer points of his career in exploitation cinema.

Franco's Finest Flesh

Venus In Furs (1969) DVD

Those of you who consistently curl your collective lips at Franco, be prepared to bite your tongue after watching Blue Underground's astounding uncut print of his masterstroke of erotic noir *Venus in Furs*. Taking its title from the notorious porn-lite book of the same name written by Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch in 1870, *Venus* stars James Darren (*The Time Tunnel*) as a confused trumpet-playing jazzman, whose encounters with a mysterious, often nude, possibly deceased bombshell (Maria Rohm) are driving him off the deep end.



Nothing in this film makes any linear sense, but that's part of its psychedelic charm. In fact, anyone who's seen Lynch's *Lost Highway* or D.A. Caruso's *The Salton Sea* will be shocked at how much those pictures lift from this delirious flick. *Venus in Furs* is loaded with weird lighting, rough sex, savage S&M, fantastic jazz music (by freakin' Manfred Mann!) and beautiful coastal photography. And did I mention Klaus Kinski turns up as a swami sadist?

99 Women (1969) DVD

The ultimate women in prison epic, *99 Women* (a.k.a. *Island of Despair*, *Prostitutes in Prison* and *The Hot Death*) is one of several glossy features Franco made in his creative prima for Harry Alan Towers, a gentlemanly British perv who produced some high-class trash all the way into the '80s, and this handsomely-shot, lockdown rug-munch potboiler has his elegantly lecherous stamp all over it.



The actual Spanish island prison setting is ideal in creating a feeling of isolation and cruelty. Speaking of cruelty, Mercedes McCambridge (*The Exorcist*) is frightening as the psycho dyke guard, and Herbert Lom collects a paycheque convincingly as the obtuse and perverted warden. *99 Women*, presented by Blue Underground in its unrated cut, rocks on every exploitation level imaginable: lots of nudity, violence and sleaze... if you like that sort of thing of course.

Chris Alexander



A characteristically sexy moment from Franco's ***Female Vampire****.*

Furs, She Killed in Ecstasy, Eugenie – *move like music, like free-form symphonies. How has your background in jazz affected you as a filmmaker?*

Music has been a very important part of my life almost since I was born. Film was always the intellectual fountain of all my work, but it was united to music even though I didn't want it to be. I need cinema so I can express myself, and music so I can breathe.

You're also a protégé of Orson Welles; what did you learn from him?

To stand beside Orson Welles was for me more important than any prize in the world, not only as a lucid and genial school, but also as a personal lesson in life with all of its insanities and contradictions. I learned more from Orson Welles in the first fifteen days of working with him, than I have from all the film schools and academies in the world.

How did Welles influence you specifically?

He communicated his enthusiasm, he made me emulate his creative concept of cinema, his strength to overcome all difficulties with a sense of humour, his talent to direct actors. In short, he gave me everything.

You're in pre-production on your next film* Cries In the Night. *What can you tell us about it?

Cries In the Night has been postponed by its producers several times. Maybe it'll never get done. But it isn't that bad because I have lots of other things to do and to get going. I've just finished *Snakewoman* and I'm preparing Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House Next to the Cemetery*. I'm going to be taking on a principal role in *Esperpentos*, based on the work of Valle Inclan and directed by Jose Luis Garcia Sanchez, this fall, and after that I'm going to make *The Case of the Frightened Whore*, based on a novel by Edgar Wallace. Lastly, I'm planning one of the most important projects of my entire life: [Latin/Cordoban writer] Seneca's *Medea* with Lina Romay in what I think will be her most important role in cinema.

I've read that you feel you have never made your "masterpiece". Do you think you'll ever make it?

The master John Ford used to say that a masterpiece is the happy result of a job. But who judges the work? Who decides what is a masterwork and what isn't? One needs to put all of his will, strength and intelligence into every film and then one of them could be considered a masterpiece. I don't believe I have made a masterpiece, but hardly any filmmaker has. A masterpiece is Joyce's *Ulysses*, Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* or Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. [Filmmakers] should be more modest.

Some of your comments seem to devalue the medium in which you choose to work, and despite that, you affirm that you'll continue to make films as long as you can. There seems to be a contradiction; why do you continue to work in this medium?

I work in this medium because I love cinema above all things, since I was eight years old.

Where many of your contemporaries have given up, you continue making films your way. Will you ever retire?

I will never retire; I will continue making films until the last day. I need to. ☠





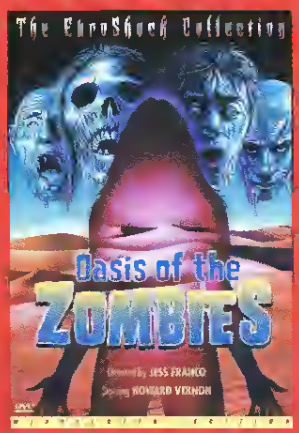
This spring, Image Entertainment rolls out the crimson carpet for an all-new *JESS FRANCO COLLECTION* box set. Get ready for some wet love...

Franco's FIENDISH FOURSOME



by Chris Alexander

Oasis of the Zombies (1982)



I'm gonna go out on a limb here and cite *Oasis of the Zombies* as perhaps the worst living dead movie ever made. Equal parts *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, George Romero and Ed Wood, *Oasis* concerns a booty of cursed Nazi gold that some Third Reich numbskulls buried deep within the Sahara desert and is now guarded by a gaggle of flesh-eating, putty-faced ping pong-eyed corpses.

This is an alternate French language version of a long-lost Spanish film called *Tombs of the Living Dead*, and while I can't vouch for the Español edition, I can certainly say that this cut is – handsome desert locales and minor league gut-munching aside – absolute *mierda*, a prime example of the kinds of films that give Franco a dubious reputation among casual fans. Uncut and in widescreen, so you can see even more of Franco's never-ending opus than ever before.

A Virgin Among the Living Dead (1973)



The first film a shaken Franco made after the untimely death of Miranda, *Virgin* is a haunting and lyrical but unfortunately kinda snoozy movie, kept afloat by a great Bruno Nicolai score, copious amounts of female nudity and a dark sense of absurdist humour. Curvy blonde Christina (played by curvy blonde Christina Von Blanc) arrives at the creepy Monserrat Mansion for the reading of her father's will only to find a castle of freaks, ghosts, zombies and weirdos that include Franco regular Howard Vernon and the impish director himself (essentially reprising his role from *Vampyros Lesbos*).

Increasingly odd things occur as the film gradually loses hold of any narrative thrust it began with and becomes a more traditionally surreal Franco stew loaded with nudity, bent camera angles and mild gore. *Virgin* exists in many different versions, including a porn cut that omits the living dead angle entirely. Image is to be commended for restoring the full, uncensored French director's edit and presenting it for the first time in glorious widescreen.

The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus (1962)



Here is Franco in the early stages of his game, when he was still somewhat concerned about things like plot, character, suspense and structure. *The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus* is a first-rate, tense, sexy and eene mystery thriller with copious amounts of the titular sadism and lots of pre-censor T&A. Essentially a riff on the AIP/Corman-Poe adaptations, the film concerns a slew of violent rusty knife murders in a small German village that appear to be the work of the resurrected Baron, a medieval psycho with a penchant for whips and red-hot pokers.

Red Herrings abound and, admittedly, you'll see the big revelation coming a mile away, but the style, eye-opening sex and violence, and a lovely score by Franco standby Daniel White make this one – never officially released on these shores – a certified classic of its kind.

Female Vampire (1973)

Those of you who are only familiar with the old Lightning Video version of this Franco throb-a-thon (called *Erotikill*) are in a for zipper-snapping treat with this two-shades-shy of hardcore cut. Franco essentially shot three versions of this film for different markets with different degrees of explicitness. *Erotikill* is the tamest, in which the luscious Lina Romay plays an oft-nude vampire countess who drains the blood from her victims, but in this version she leaves the jugular be and simply sucks their genital juices... in graphic detail.



This is Franco at his most voyeuristic and Romay (Franco's replacement muse after the death of Soledad Miranda of *Vampyros Lesbos*) is game for whatever muff-diving directions the pervie filmmaker gives her. Lingering crotch shots, smoldering pornographic sex scenes, Romay's near-perfect body and Daniel White's gorgeous score make *Female Vampire* one of Jess's most beloved and controversial works. The scene where Romay goes down on a dame for ten minutes and emerges with a face full of girl goo is a bold, ummm, stroke of erotica seldom rivaled in any genre pic. ☠

EYE ON SPAIN

Behold the dark art of Spanish fine artist ROBERT HERNANDEZ.



Arte de la oscuridad

by Jovanka Vuckovic



Madrid: Capital of Spain since 1562, home to some of the world's top artists, among them Francisco de Goya (see Classic Cut, p. 94), surrealist and experimental filmmaker Salvador Dali (*Un chien andalou*, 1929) and Pablo Picasso. But Madrid is also home to some of the world's greatest art; masterpieces by Hieronymus Bosch (*RM#45*) and Albrecht Dürer hang in the city's Museo del Prado, one of the Western world's earliest and largest public art galleries. Madrid is a place where Halloween is a nationally recognized holiday, and one that seems to acknowledge and celebrate the art of darkness. It's the perfect home for modern artist Robert Hernandez.

"Every country is equally interesting but Spain, like many European countries, has a great cultural richness," Hernandez tells *Rue Morgue* from his studio on Calle de la Union in Madrid. "Every region or city in the country is replete with monuments and art in general, which is great inspiration."

Hernandez's eerie, vibrant pastel on brown paper art clearly reflects the Gothic architecture that surrounds him, as it does the Catholic iconography that saturates the country's living canvas. The difference is that Hernandez renders them several shades darker, with a touch of the monstrous.

"When I draw, I like a sinister setting and forms that are sometimes abstract that, little by little, acquire the characteristics of a nightmare," he explains. "But I don't consider *myself* very dark, I enjoy making sinister images, but not exclusively – I like playing with lots of colours and with the light within that darkness."

A native of Spain's capitol, Hernandez found much inspiration in the work of the great classical artists like Brueghel, Bosch, Dali, van Eyck, Caravaggio and Vermer, to name a few. Not surpris-





"I like a sinister setting and forms that are sometimes abstract that, little by little, acquire the characteristics of a nightmare." - Robert Hernandez



ingly, he prefers to work in pencil, brush and pastel but admits a fondness for people who adapt new technologies in painting, like surrealists Beksinski and Dave McKean. To that end, Hernandez has taken his talent into the realm of tattoo art and is currently one of the world's most highly-regarded tattoo artists, specializing in real and surreal portraiture and sinister creatures in general. It's not surprising to hear him credit his interest in the macabre to his love of the horror film.

"*The Exorcist*, Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* and *Dark City* are my modern favourites," admits Hernandez, being careful to point out a special love for Mumau's *Nosferatu*, Herzog's remake and Lang's *Metropolis*. Today the artist borrows creepy images from those movies and renders them in the landscape of his boundless imagination, juxtaposed by a complex geometry and the beauty of insects, particularly butterflies.

"I love films of science fiction and terror," he says. "Many of them have this power to awaken new ideas and images to explore on paper or any other type of art. A great example of this would be a film like Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula*, which is full of dark images that are attractive and romantic at the same time."

Unlike the macabre moving pictures Hernandez is inspired by, his art – whether on skin or paper – echoes its own silent terrors with motionless, but no less moving, intensity. Witness modern Spanish dark art at its finest at www.rhernandeztattoos.com.

EYE ON SPAIN

A country of opposites and extremes, Spain's penchant for sleaze exploitation and polished art house has given it one of the most intriguing resumes in the genre.

Hispanic Horror: *A Brief History*

by Jay Slater

Think of European horror movies and chances are most would go for the Italians: the splatter films of Lucio Fulci, Ruggero Deodato, Sergio Martino and the stylistic visceral powerhouses of celluloid terror from Dario Argento. But what of our Spanish friends? To the casual fan, Spanish horror is often overlooked – unfairly, given that a large number of European productions originated from more than one country. The spaghetti western – championed by Sergio Leone and Sergio Corbucci – is one such genre that benefited from Spain's financial and technical sources.

Spanish cinema dates back to 1886, when film was in its infancy, and a new art form developed with a slew of operattas and literary adaptations that blossomed in a rich visual tapestry until the outbreak of war in 1936, when General Francisco Franco imposed a national censor. Thanks to influence of Italian neo-realism, the new Spanish cinema focused on sharp opposition to popular mainstream genres, and in 1977, with the official abolition of censorship, the fuse was lit for an explosion of exploitation.

It's not as if the Spanish exploitation movies were badly dubbed and inferior products to their Italian cousins. At best, Spain produced wonderfully energetic pictures rippling with deranged razzmatazz and attitude. At worst, Spanish cinema took trash to new depths. Stinkers like *Supersonic Man* (1979), *Extra Terrestrial Visitors* (1983) and *Slugs* (1988) from Juan Piquer Simón – Spain's answer to Italy's Bruno Mattei for sheer bad filmmaking – have nevertheless gained a cult following, but at the same time, gems from Paul Naschy, Jess Franco, Amando de Ossorio and newcomers like Nacho Cerdà have also been brought out of relative obscurity. Following is a selected chronological list of some of the country's most memorable and influential horror classics.



Tombs of the Blind Dead
(La Noche del terror ciego, 1971)

One of the earliest and most superior Spanish horror movies is Amando de Ossorio's *Tombs of the Blind Dead*. It begins in the 13th century, when a legion of evil knights known as The Templars sought eternal life by drinking human blood and were executed for their dastardly crimes – their eyes to be pecked out by crows. In modern day Portugal, a trio of Spanish backpackers disturb The Templars' slumber in a remote and ancient abbey and, without further ado, crypts and graves cough up their rotting residents as the blind dead shuffle towards their human prey.

Ossorio's direction is assured and the cast perform reasonably well in a movie that sounds preposterous on paper, but on celluloid it works beautifully. Visually, *Tombs of the Blind Dead* is high on atmosphere and unmatched for its scenes of the undead Templars on horseback, clip-clopping through banks of fog in slow motion, sporting leathered skulls with empty eye sockets and tufts of fashionable goatee beards.

The Glass Ceiling
(El Techo de crystal, 1971)

In Eloy de la Iglesia's Hispanic fright fest, Patty Shepard is plunged into a world of catatonia and claustrophobia where her mental state is questioned as well as her possible involvement in a murder. With solid, if surreal, direction, superb performances and a minimal soundtrack, *The Glass Ceiling* is one of Iglesia's best movies – far better than *The Cannibal Man* – and remains a criminally obscure title.

Graveyard of Horror
(Necrophagus, 1971)

Miguel Madrid's *Graveyard of Horror* is misleading in that it does not feature scenes of necrophilia, but the film does boast a claw-hugging monster that feeds on the inhabitants of a cemetery. An amateurish production, *Graveyard of Horror* vanished into VHS obscurity. But you know that you're in for a treat when a film opens with a shot of London while "Scotland the Brave" plays on the soundtrack.

The Blood Spattered Bride
(La Novia ensangrentada, 1972)

Thankfully spiced with a generous helping of female nudity and gore, Vicente Aranda's *The Blood Spattered Bride* would have otherwise been a bore. A lesbian vampire seduces a couple on their honeymoon – which reaches a bloody crescendo where the hero rips out the hearts of the bloodsuckers. To his credit, Aranda does achieve a degree of poetic and surreal cinematography, but the movie degenerates into a lacklustre and violent shocker whose scenes of lesbianism are its saving grace.

Cut Throats Nine
(Condenados a vivir, 1972)

Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent's *Cut Throats Nine* has gained cult status among both western and splatter genre aficionados. A motley group of rapists and murderers escape justice and flee to the wilderness shackled together with a heavy chain. The convicts soon realize that they can lighten the load and, in a twisted take on *The Weakest Link*, begin to kill one another with extreme prejudice. Explicit with its portrayal of serious gore, but shot with less visual flair than the more accomplished Italian co-production, *Cut Throats Nine* is a grim and shocking western with a lasting bitter taste.

A Dragonfly For Each Corpse
(Una libélula para cada muerto, 1973)

During the 1960s and '70s, independent cinema made it possible for countries to have their own hero/villain recognized only in their own territory. Paul Naschy, a podgy ex-weightlifter was Spain's favourite lead in exploitation cinema and stars in León Klimovsky's *A Dragonfly For Each Corpse*, a notably violent thriller. Whereas many Italian thrillers are overly stylish, *Dragonfly* is more focused on violence, like an umbrella impaling and the severing of heads and limbs. Naschy went on to star in more gratuitous nasty product like Carlos Aured's *Blue Eyes of the Broken Doll* (*Los Djos azules de la muñeca rota*) and *Curse of the Devil* (*El Retorno de walpurgis*, both 1973).

Let Sleeping Corpses Lie
(No profanar el sueño de los muertos, 1974)

Let Sleeping Corpses Lie (a.k.a. *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue*) is considered one of the genre's more effective zombie movies, boasting extreme physical carnage and a witty stab at ecological politics. It is also one of the first horror pictures to be released in stereophonic sound. Basking in the success of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Manchester Morgue* is highly entertaining nonsense livened by Arthur Kennedy's role as a fascist detective and Jorge Grau's solid direction.

The Werewolf and the Yeti
(La Maldición de la bestia, 1975)

Miguel Iglesias Bonn's ridiculous *The Werewolf and the Yeti* is a movie that has to be seen to be believed – and once you have seen it, you'll wish you hadn't. The film's star and writer, Paul Naschy (a.k.a. Jacinto Molina), appears to have had a ball concocting a narrative that features a cigar-smoking lycanthrope, a preteen cutie, a slinky sorceress, two naked cannibal beauties and a yeti that looks like a lager-stained pub rug. Shuffle scenes of cannibalism with a sex orgy, flaying, nude women tortured and skinned, and you have a movie that is irresistible to disciples of bad Spanish exploitation cinema.

Would You Kill A Child?
(Quién puede matar a un niña?, 1975)

This demonic-child horror movie is fabulous stuff that prefigures Stephen King's *Children of the Corn* (1984). Directed with verve by Narcisco Ibáñez Serrador, the story revolves around an English couple who visit a holiday island entirely populated by children – it's as if all the adults have vanished into thin air. What remains is a state governed by the evil offspring who take the law into their own hands, often with dire consequences for anyone aged in their late teens and above. Genuinely powerful and spooky, Serrador's ace card is that the audience does not suspect who the killers are until the punch has truly connected.



Man's Worst Friend

ROTTWEILER

Starring William Miller, Irene Montalà and Paul Naschy
Directed by Brian Yuzna
Written by Miguel Tejada-Flores and Alberto Vázquez Figueroa
Lion's Gate Home Entertainment

A savvy filmmaker can stretch his horror movie buck a lot further in the hot Spanish sun. Presumably this is why Brian Yuzna, of *Re-Animator* series fame, has carved out a comfortable career for himself making mediocre – but undoubtedly profitable – exploitation movies there, like *Arachnid* and *Faust: Love of the Damned*. His latest Spanish film crew employment opportunity is the straight-up, straight-to-video killer dog flick *Rottweiler*.



With a script by previous Yuzna collaborator Miguel Tejada-Flores – whose resume ranges from the decent (*Fright Night 2*), to the weak (*Darkness*), to the downright silly (*Beyond Re-Animator*) – the film is exactly what you'd expect from a shoestring fusion of *The Terminator* and *Man's Best Friend*.

In the year 2018, Spanish prisoners – specifically those in camps for trying to illegally cross the border – are kept in check by ultra-vicious, man-eating cyborg Rottweilers (well, just one, really). When one captive bolts, dog and master pursue him through the scrubby mountains of Spain, where the terrain is rugged but you don't have to spend a Euro on sets or lighting.

When the desperate Kid Rock look-alike hero kills the robo-mutt's master, it's a no-paws-barred chase with occasional gory dog attacks, requisite boobies in the form of a horny peasant woman, and tragic back story flashbacks with a very Spanish soap opera feel to ramp up the character drama. The final showdown in a drug-addled dystopian town with the Rottweiler's owner (played with piss 'n' vinegar by native horror legend Paul Naschy, *RM#46*), is e fiery cheeseball of explosions and bad CG dog skeleton.

A mildly fun but mechanically-plotted and ultimately lame DVD cheapie, the film won't do much to up the profile of Spanish horror, or the career of producer/director Yuzna. But if you think those were *Rottweiler*'s goals, you're barkin' up the wrong tree, dawg.

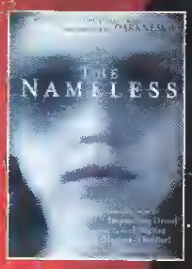
Dave Alexander

A Spanish Se7en?

THE NAMELESS

Starring Emma Vilarasau,
Karra Elejalde and Tristan Ulloa
Written and directed by Jaume Balagueró
Dimension Films

Jaume Balagueró represents a new generation of Spanish filmmakers with an interest in mystery and horror, two items that have been kissing cousins since Edgar Allan Poe penned *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. The division between the two has always been more a matter of emphasis than content, and a macabre heart beats beneath all but the most prosaic whodunnits. But few have been capable of weaving the threads of both genres together into a compelling hybrid, and Balagueró's first feature film (followed by *Darkness* and the upcoming *Fragile*) surely weaves, but not tightly enough.



Based on Ramsey Campbell's novel of the same name, Balagueró's Spanish-lensed *The Nameless* (a.k.a. *Los Sin Nombre*, 1999) plants its feet firmly in horror territory during its opening moments as police detective Massera (Elejalde) investigates the ritualistic mutilation and murder of a six-year-old girl.

But what looks like another grim, by-the-numbers serial killer hunt takes a tantalizing turn as the film jumps ahead five years to find the dead girl's still-traumatized mother Claudia (Vilarasau) receiving phone calls from someone claiming to be her daughter, very much alive and in jeopardy from a cult seeking divinity through evil. Teaming with the now-retired Massera, Claudia follows a trail of increasingly-disturbing clues (or are they bait?) leading her inexorably toward the revelation of her daughter's true fate.

With its themes of loss, and a protagonist driven to perilous extremes in order to heal deep emotional scars no matter the cost, *The Nameless* echoes Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973) and George Sluizer's *The Vanishing* (a.k.a. *Spoorloos*, 1988), and even manages to capture some of the same pervasive sense of melancholy. But despite strong performances from the leads, Balagueró's emphasis on creepy visuals and some unnerving but superfluous narrative cul-de-sacs leave the characters floundering and, worst of all, rob Claudia's torment of its emotional core. As a result, the film's final revelations fail to resonate; it aims for *Se7en* but winds up more like Four and a Half.

Joseph O'Brien

In a Glass Cage
(Tras el Cristal, 1986)

In a Glass Cage – a beautifully crafted Spanish film about a concentration camp commandant left crippled in an iron lung and at the mercy of a young boy he had previously sexually-molested – divides critics. Director Agustín Villaronga tackles an extreme narrative that many before him would have left well alone, ending up with a harrowing yet captivating picture. To label *In a Glass Cage* as exploitation is criminal; its climax is emotional and powerful enough to leave audiences winded. Once seen, never forgotten.

Anguish
(Angustia, 1987)

Bigas Luna's English-language *Anguish* prefigures the post-modern horrors of the *Scream* franchise by a good nine years. Starring a portly Michael Lerner as an eye doctor who makes house calls and Zelda (*Poltergeist*) Rubinstein as his dominating, banshee-voiced mother, *Anguish* plays out like a subpar slasher film up until the fifteen-minute mark – when the audience is treated to a major twist that ends up being both the film's ongoing conceit and major plot device. A clever, intelligent satire on the effects that horror films apparently have on unhinged audience members, *Anguish* is one of Spain's undiscovered genre gems.

Faceless
(Los Depredadores de la noche, 1988)

In 1988, Jess Franco cannibalized the central premise from his previous *The Awful Doctor Orloff* – itself a rip-off homage of George Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1959) – with the incredibly gory *Faceless*. The admittedly sleazy and horrific premise, whereby a Nazi doctor surgically removes the facial skin of unwilling beauties, makes *Faceless* an effective and slick horror flick and one of Franco's most technically competent efforts.

Howl of the Devil
(El Aullido del Diablo, 1988)

Naschy returned as star and director in his most ambitious work *Howl of the Devil*. Featuring a cameo by ex-Bond girl Caroline Munro, *Howl of the Devil* is a homage to older screen monsters such as the wolfman, Frankenstein and Dracula. The film has only been broadcast on Spanish television and has not surfaced on video, which is surprising, given that it boasts scenes of disembowelment with flowing internal organs, impalings, slashings, sexual mutilation, exploding bodies and sexual torture.

Modern Spanish Cinema

Over the past ten years Spanish cinema has continued to be distinguished by some of the liveliest talents, and thanks to the phenomenon of DVD, movies that were released in their native country only to gather dust are slowly being distributed by vanity publishers. Álex de la Iglesia's *Day of the Beast* (1995) and *Perdita Durango* (1997) along with Nacho Cerdà's *Aftermath* (1994) were movies that paved the way for Spanish exploitation cinema to be recognized globally.

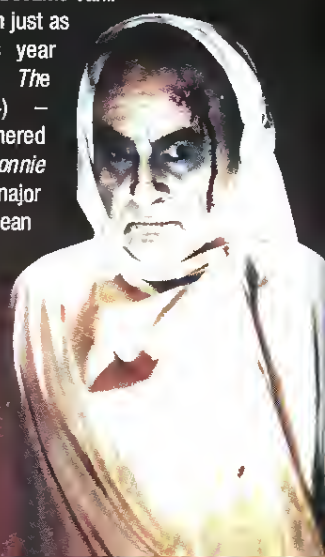
Today Spain's new generation of genre filmmakers includes Pedro Almodóvar, considered an art house filmmaker who never went further than he did with *Matador* (1986), a voluptuous fusion of black humour and subterranean sexuality. He also produced both *The Devil's Backbone* (Mexican filmmaker Guillermo del Toro's Spanish ghost film) and 1993's space-horror movie Mutant Action.

In addition, Jaume Balaguero's *Darkness* (2001), part of Brian Yuzna's Fantastic Factory, is visually top-notch with excellent special effects and Juan Carlos Fresnadillo's *Intacto* (2001) is an amazing picture whose labyrinth complexity and style will demand repeated viewings as it offers new takes on the story and characters.

Also recommended are Paco Plaza's *Second Name* (2002, based on a Ramsey Campbell novel) Noberto Lopez's *They're Watching* (2002), *Fausto 5.0*, (2001) which was helmed by three directors, *Tuno Negro* (2001), an enjoyable slasher that takes *Scream* for its inspiration and turns the sub-genre on its head.

Madrid-raised Alejandro Amenábar followed his stunning feature-length debut *Thesis* (1996) with the dark *Open Your Eyes* (1997) and *Nobody Knows Anybody* (1999) before crossing over into Hollywood with 2001's *The Others*, starring Nicole Kidman.

Brian Yuzna's recent Spanish production of *Beyond Re-Animator* (2003) was a box-office success. And American remakes including *Open Your Eyes* (which became *Vanilla Sky*) have been just as successful. This year Eugenio Mira's *The Birthday* (2004) – which has garnered comparisons to *Donnie Darko* – made major waves at European film festivals, proving that Spanish horror films are as potent as ever.



Paul Naschy in ***Howl of the Devil.***

REEL TOYS

NECA

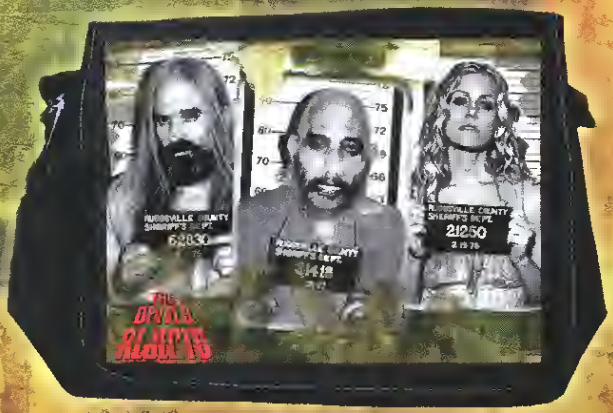
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Everyone has heard of the Video Nasties, that notorious list of films that were once the subject of a countrywide ban in the United Kingdom. But few are aware of the ensuing witch hunt that drove collectors underground and, in some cases, into prison.

THE FORBIDDEN ERA

The Strange Account of the Video Nasties

by Jay Slater



Picture this: the police raid your house, filling evidence bags with video cassettes and anything else that they might want to use as ammunition against you in a court of law. You're arrested, bundled into a car and taken away. Surely they're mistaken – you're not a terrorist or paedophile – all you've done is collect horror videos. If it's the mid-1980s during the dark days of Margaret Thatcher's iron-fisted regime, however, you're worse than a drug dealer. You're a threat to society and need to be punished. Period.

In 1983 crime figures in the UK were rising, Thatcher wanted a culprit, and unclassified video was her whipping boy. Previously, only theatrical prints were rated by the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) and video as a relative newcomer to the entertainment industry was simply overlooked. Video itself was not a loose cannon but governing bodies, spurred on by Thatcher's spin doctors, made sure that the press damned pre-certified films as "Video Nasties" – films that were said to be evil and could entice certain members of society to commit a bloody act of crime. It's sheer lunacy of course, but the gullible public devoured what they were told, and uncertified videos such as *The Beast In Heat*, *Cannibal Ferox*, *Cannibal Holocaust*, *Zombie* (*Zombie Flesh Eaters* in the UK) and even *The Evil Dead* were suddenly held responsible for the ills of society. Horror buffs began to worry as the noose tightened around their necks.

The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) drew up a list of videos that were liable for prosecution, 39 films were cleared from the nation's shops and successfully prosecuted. Videos were expensive, storeowners lost capital and some even shut down. It was utter confusion – what exactly was a "Video Nasty"? The titles listed by the DPP, or every uncertified cassette? Even the police who raided the stores had no idea, one shop had *The Thing* and *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* seized and destroyed. James Ferman, who was at the time the head of the BBFC, stated that he refused a

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"Horror was seen as an unintelligent genre only fit for degenerates."

126 min
NTSC

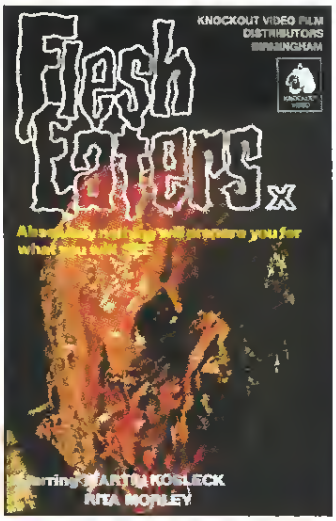
certificate for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, as the working class might not be able to understand its horror mechanics and might possibly harm each other as a result. Then the 1984 Video Recordings Act came into play in an effort to legalize classification and offer guidelines to distributors, who in turn saw their movies refused a certificate outright or suffer huge cuts. Horror was seen as an unintelligent genre only fit for degenerates.

In the industry, hysteria and chaos were key. Companies had no idea what they could submit in the dawn of new, severe censorship. Indeed, some distributors took drastic steps before they submitted their movies to be ravaged by the censors' scissors. One such company, Apex Distribution Ltd., cut Andrea Bianchi's *Burial Ground* – a sleazy Italian poverty-row zombie flick – by over ten minutes before submission, and it was then cut a further three minutes and eleven seconds by the UK's moral guardians. After being ceremonially beaten to submission by the censors, it was released with a running time of just over an hour.

Another story circulated that Lucio Fulci's *The New York Ripper* was screened at the BBFC prior to classification and its distributor expected heavy cuts to be ordered before its release. However, fearing that Fulci's movie could corrupt citizens to commit murder, the Board ordered the 35mm print out of the country, riding shotgun with a police escort. Soon British distributors wouldn't touch Italian horror movies with a ten-foot pole.



Meanwhile, shops were raided and collectors busted without mercy. One brave entrepreneur continued to import horror and pornography from Amsterdam directly and advertise his bootlegging service in horror film magazines such as *The Dark Side*. He allegedly made enough copying an unreleased studio edit of *Hellraiser 3* to buy a car. Not surprisingly, he was duped by the authorities who sent letters disguised as if an illiterate child wrote them. After ordering *I Spit On Your Grave* and a Traci Lords porno, the authorities arrested him, cleared his house of tapes and even searched his father's chicken coop in case he had hidden the odd H.G. Lewis movie amongst the poultry. They also seized the addresses of his contacts, after throwing him in a cell and giv-



Continued on page 34

The LAST of the NASTIES

Harvey Fenton wasn't kidding about the difficulty of compiling a comprehensive list of titles banned by Margaret Thatcher's thought police in the early '80s. The last 39 films were added in December 1985 and are known as the "DPP39" (Director of Public Prosecutions 39). They range from classics to crap and all points in between but, nevertheless, were deemed too violent, sexy or subversive for the eyes and ears of British genre fans. They DPP39 remain the last of the "true video nasties."

Absurd
Andy Warhol's Frankenstein
Anthropophagus the Beast
Axe
The Beast in Heat
Blood Bath
Blood Feast
Blood Rites
Bloody Moon
The Burning (uncut)
Cannibal Apocalypse
Cannibal Ferox (uncut)
Cannibal Holocaust
The Cannibal Man
The Devil Hunter
Don't Go in the Woods... Alone!
The Driller Killer
Evilspeak
Expose
Faces of Death
Fight For Your Life
Forest of Fear
Gestapo's Last Orgy
The House by the Cemetery
House on the Edge of the Park
I Spit on Your Grave
Island of Death
The Last House on the Left
Love Camp 7
Madhouse
Mardi Gras Massacre
Night of the Bloody Apes
Night of the Demon
Nightmares in a Damaged Brain
Snuff
SS Experiment Camp
Tenebre
The Werewolf and the Yeti
Zombie Flesh Eaters

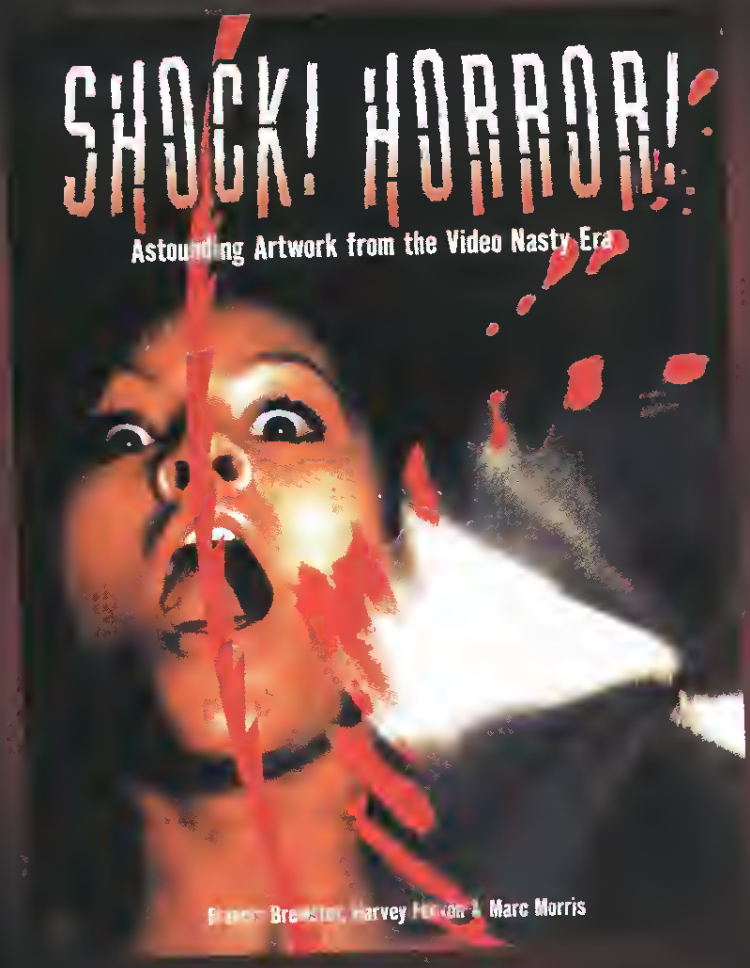
John W. Bowen

In 1980s Thatcherian Britain, VHS tapes were tyrannically banned and sometimes the owners arrested based on box art alone. These were the legendary "video nasties" – horror films with illicit slipcase art that gave rise to conservative hysteria and became forbidden fruit for collectors. A new book from **FAB PRESS** compiles hundreds of the still-coveted contraband covers for the very first time.



VULGAR VIDEO ART

by John W. Bowen



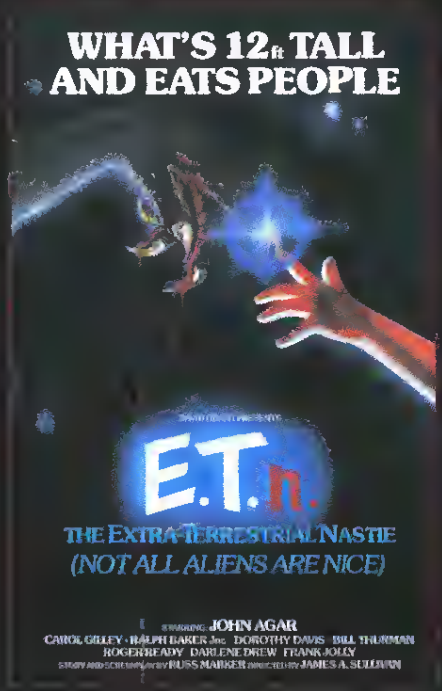
Like career criminals reminiscing fondly about their earliest dabblings in petty larceny, many genre fans – this writer included – can trace their evolution as horror nerds back to certain primary sources. A personal point of no return was the home video explosion of the early '80s, the era of *Maniac*, *The Evil Dead*, *Re-Animator* and unhealthy amounts of Euro-skank. Given that the advertising for these titles was minimal at best and word of mouth only a little better, the ultra-lurid box cover art of the era was often the deciding factor.

Hence the fatal attraction of *Shock! Horror! Astounding Artwork From the Video Nasty Era*, a drool-inducing collection of lovingly restored, full-colour reproductions of banned VHS box cover artwork from a conservative 1980s Britain. As sordid and tacky as many of these graphics may be, there's no denying their artistry and ingenuity, ranging as they do from ultra-gory stills of gouged eyes and slaughtered women to schlocky expressionism and, in one case (*Cannibal Holocaust*), a direct lift from Goya's painting *Saturn Devouring One of His Children* (see pg. 94).

"They looked pretty grotty," writer/editor Harvey Fenton explains, adding that no small amount of digital restoration was required to restore the artwork to its pristine, pulpy glory. "My aim was to show the video covers as they would have looked new, rather than as knackered old artifacts. It took about two full weeks of Photoshop work to sort it all out. The worst one to work on was *Cannibal Man*, which was literally falling apart at the seams."

Fenton, along with co-writers/compilers Francis Brewster and Marc Morris, tracked down the covers by digging through the British Film Institute's collection of trade magazines, plumbing the dusty cellar of the country's oldest video distributor, and tracking down copies through private collectors.

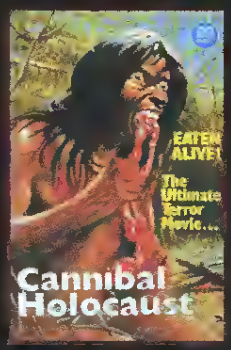






"The rarest ones are probably *E.T.n.* [*Extra-Terrestrial Nastie*, an *E.T.* take-off] because it was withdrawn," he notes. "*Flesh Eaters* because only a handful were produced, and *Panic* because it was a trade sample."

Taglines for the films are also among the attractions here. Who could possibly resist *Boarding House* ("Where the rent won't KILL YDU, but something else WILL!")? Honourable mentions in the sloganeering sleaze sweepstakes go to *Death Weekend* ("It began with a rape. It ended with a massacre!"), *Evil Come Evil Go* ("No man is safe from the Preacherwoman – she's a man-hating, hymn-humming Hell cat!"), feminist classic *Violation of the Bitch* ("She asked for it!") and, of course, *Invasion of the Blood Farmers* ("They planted the LIVING and harvested the DEAD!").



The book also documents the Video Nasties Era (see page 29), a bleak period in early '8Ds England when crazed Thatcherite censors arbitrarily banned dozens of titles, sometimes because of the cover art alone. Distributors and retailers were prosecuted left and right, some actually did jail time, and many more faced financial and personal ruin.

The constantly-shifting list is detailed in a convoluted two-page flow chart in the book. According to Fenton: "About twenty lists were issued at different times, and they were always different. It basically depended on whether tapes had been proscribed and were awaiting prosecution, had been acquitted, or were successfully prosecuted. But it's even more complicated, because sometimes a title that was prosecuted would then later be cleared, and vice versa."

In these parts, one likes to think, such a witch hunt would result in widespread anti-censorship activism, but such was not the case across the pond in the '8Ds.

"Not at all," Fenton laments. "British people are notoriously stoical and the 'silent majority' are reluctant to speak out."

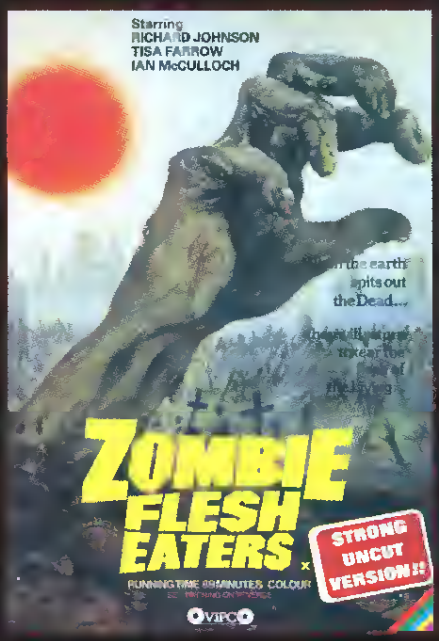
In fact, he affirms, things briefly got even worse in 1994 after the horrific murder of toddler Jamie Bulger by two older boys, a crime the media immediately tried to blame on *Child's Play 3*. Newfound freedom in recent years finally came not from public protest but office politics.

"The main change in direction started in 1999 when James Ferman retired as director," says Fenton. "Two titles which he had always refused to consider, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Exorcist*, were passed without cuts, and numerous kung fu films were allowed to show nunchakus, at last!"

Collectors, however, are often less interested in the films than they are in cultural artifacts. According to Fenton: "Many of the [previously] banned titles are very poor films and of no interest to today's fans. However, there is still great demand for the original tapes on eBay, with the rarest titles like *The Beast in Heat* fetching over £5DD despite the fact that the Media Blasters DVD, as '*SS Hell Camp*', can be bought for less than $20."

Shock! Horror! is now in stores and can also be ordered through www.fabpress.com.







A vicio[illegible] ra[illegible] from ***Last House on the Left***





ing him the good cop/bad cop treatment. He was fifteen years old at the time. The result was nationwide TV and press coverage of his arrest, a "disgusting" video haul of filth and a $10,800 fine to boot.

It's amusing to reflect back on those draconian times, to when an appalled police detective held a video tape of *Anthropophagous the Beast* up to TV cameras – accompanied by a background video clip of bad boy George Eastman as the cannibal tucking into Serena Grandi's unborn foetus – and stated that the murders in the movie were real. Yep, that's right – a snuff movie. Meanwhile, in conservative Singapore, the film was given a "PG" rating.

Drastic times required drastic measures, and the horror fan did all he could to defeat the law. Some collectors moved their video collection from house to house, and came up with bizarre methods of importing tapes. One fellow arranged for an uncut Venezuelan print of *Last House on the Left* to be sent to Sweden, where the cassette was spliced with a one-hour documentary on the humble mudfish in order to get it through customs.

Another collector's father was a police detective, and when the Video Nasty fury was in full swing he took a course to identify uncertified videos. Naturally, being in the police, he was concerned his son's video collection could land him in hot water. So, after a heated conversation, the father demanded that he would personally throw out films that, in his informed opinion, were taboo. Despite the expertise of his trained eye, however, legal certified videos were confiscated and the naughty culprits remained on the fan's shelves. It was further proof of the absurdity of the whole situation.

Thankfully, times have changed, two decades have passed and uncut horror movies can be bought (or downloaded) online, the DVD boom – offering superior prints and multiple extras – has helped create a huge demand for fringe movies, and since the death of James Ferman, the BBFC's policy towards the horror movie is far less vigorous than it was. *Faces of Death* has been released, as well as the uncut print of Fulci's splatter-feast *Nightmare Concert* (a.k.a. *A Cat In the Brain*), and Video Nasties can now be found on eBay for cheap.

Previous to its DVD release, an uncut *Zombie* could have fetched $200 but can now be purchased for less than a few rounds of drinks at your local watering hole. Even the king of the Video Nasty – Luigi Batzella's piss-poor *The Beast In Heat* – which at one time could go for a jaw-dropping $850 or more, has been officially released by Shriek Show as *S.S. Hell Camp*. How collectors must've simultaneously rejoiced and cried in their beers.

The Video Nasties are dead, victims of time and technology. What remains is a grim reminder of how taxpayer money was perverted for a witch hunt of almost comical proportions. A lesson learned? Doubtful. But what can be said is that the UK horror fan was right in the first place.



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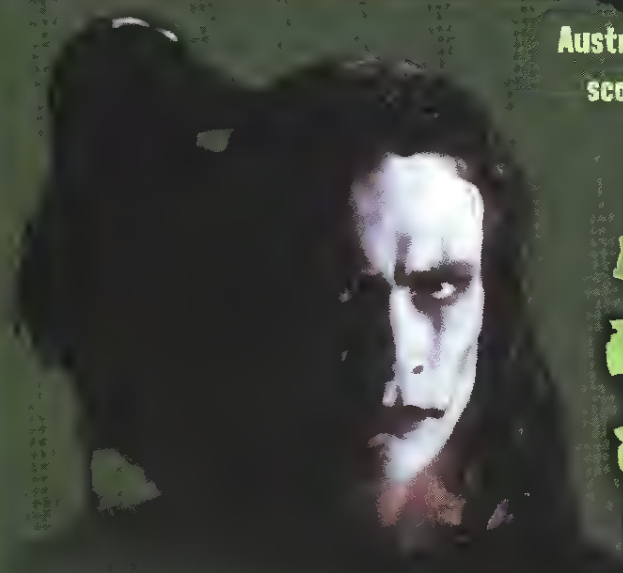
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Australian industrial punk pioneer-turned-respected scare score composer GRAEME REVELL explains how and why he makes music for the many moods of horror.

AN EAR FOR FEAR

BY DAVE ALEXANDER

While some iconic horror films are identifiable by their scores alone – Bernard Herrmann's manic violins in *Psycho*, Lalo Schifrin's ethereal chants in *Amityville* or Goblin's piercing notes in *Suspiria* – the "background music" is usually a more subtle affair, playing with viewers' emotions on a subconscious level. That marriage of sound and movement has been vital and natural to the experience of being scared since cinema broke through the silence in the 1920s. To pull those strings and push those buttons effectively, a composer must bend the right notes and noises at the right moments, and then know when to back off entirely.

Graeme Revell is a master of this sonic manipulation, having crafted sounds of suspense, terror and catharsis for a wide range of movies, among them some of the most well-known horror and dark fantasy films of the past fifteen years. The 49-year-old – who was born in New Zealand and spent his formative musical years in Australia, where he got his break in the late '80s scoring *Dead Calm* – set the tone in deadly serious movies like *The Crow*, *Below*, and *Open Water*, as well as deadly silly ones like *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Bride of Chucky* and *Freddy Vs. Jason*.

With his most recent work – the brutal, moody and hugely successful *Sin City* – he's busier than ever. Shortly before a meeting about scoring the remake of *The Fog*, Revell fills *Rue Morgue* in on his approach to putting atmosphere to image.

How did you get into your line of work?

I worked at a mental asylum when I was 22 or 23 with the usual bunch of psychotics and crazy people, and they were all drugged to the limit and very institutionalized, and nothing was happening at the hospital, so I decided to start a music therapy course, and this evolved somehow into one of Australia's first punk-industrial bands, called STK, with me and three patients. Various versions of the band happened between 1977 and 1987. I used to change styles all the time and I wrote a piece of music that, in 1989, became the basis for the score for *Dead Calm*. I got into the line of work purely by accident.

Why do you gravitate towards darker genre films?

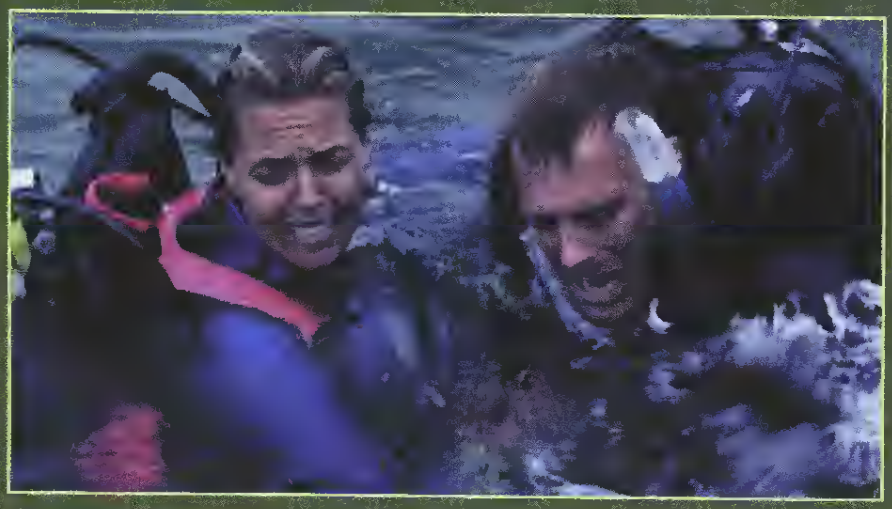
I think they're fun, for a start. There are a lot of things about horror music that vary from one project to another; they can be scored really elegantly, once you verge on the *Silence of the Lambs* kind of horror, then there's the other end, like *Freddy Vs. Jason* grade-B stuff, which is just plain crazy fun. It's all about scaring everybody really effectivel, about every minute and a half, driving the action and enabling people to laugh – especially with modern horror films. I'm not sure that anyone takes any of them very seriously anymore.

How long does it take to complete the average score?

Around four weeks is typical.

What are some of the tools you use?

I work on Gigasamplers, some old Roland (keyboards), I've got a lot of CD-ROM material of vintage sounds, a lot of my own proprietary samples that I have people working on for me all the time – for example, I did a session the other day with a guy with a bass flute. I put it though all the plug-ins – that's the exciting new environment in the Macintosh. I sequence on Digital Performer, and I just mess around with a lot of acoustic and electronic samples all the time, trying to create something really different and scary. I have a studio right outside my back door. I record everything except orchestra there.



***Open Water**: "The whole idea was to make it feel as real as possible," says Revell.*



Freddy vs. Jason: One of the less serious horror films scored by Graeme Revell.

"PEOPLE OFTEN THINK OF HORROR FILMS AS ONE GENRE. BUT THERE'S A VERY BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHUCKY AND A MOVIE LIKE *BELOW.*"
GRAEME REVELL

What are some of your guiding principals when putting together a horror score?
It's like writing a mini-symphony. You have to set up the tension and the drama a bunch of different ways in the film, otherwise the film language and the musical language become static, and you're not going to be frightened – it has to be ramped up. There are various ways to set up a scary moment. If somebody's walking down a hallway, you build [an acoustic] ramp, so it appears something really bad is going to happen, and then it might not happen at the end of it or it might. Or you could go completely quiet with just the footsteps and let the footsteps and the silence be frightening; so it's a matter of always changing it up so the audience is caught off guard. You have to think like the director and the writer. They are a team, and it's said that the composer is closest to the writer in terms of building the dramatic arc, so you've got to look at the position of the character in the film and really go with their point of view: what are they thinking, what are they hearing, what are they imagining?

In terms of marrying image to sound, how does a horror score function in comparison to other genres?
People often think of horror films as one genre, but there's a very big difference between Chucky and a movie like *Below*. But in general, you're looking at the drama the same as in any other kind of movie. You really want to connect with the main character, so when something really bad happens to them, you want to be able to feel bad for them. The other thing is there's often a monster or malevolent force that's a character of its own, and it might not always be on the screen – there's the sense that it might be lurking somewhere – so you have to take into account that character and keep suggesting its presence, even if it's not there. That way you can set up all the red herring scares of the film, those being the ones where somebody turns a corner and you set up the scare even though there's actually nothing on the screen. So the soundtrack plays a very big part as a whole other character in a film.

What's your most effective soundtrack?
I think *The Crow* really nailed it – really providing that emotion for that character. I had to really beg and eventually pay for the string session myself on that film. I told them that it was absolutely necessary to counteract all the big rock tracks they had in the film, which played to the action and the excitement, but not at all to the emotion.

The least effective?
People Under the Stairs by Wes Craven. I think it's one of the movies where I didn't really hit it properly. I agreed to do it with not enough resources, and I wasn't happy with the work I did on that film. There was a certain amount of money, and then when I saw the movie I realized it needed a lot more orchestra than I'd judged. One of the things we have to do is budget the score as well, and that was one I under-budgeted.

HAVING TROUBLE SCORING YOUR OWN FILM?

INTRODUCING... DEAD HOUSE MUSIC

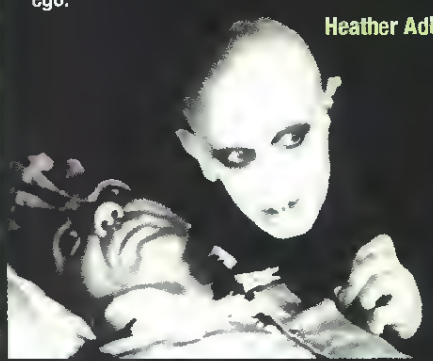
An onscreen bloodbath just isn't bone chilling without the right combination of eerie organs, nightmarish effects and morbid orchestration. But for most indie horror filmmakers, finding the cash for an original score is terrifyingly tough. Dead House Music, a one-man horror music house run by a gore junkie simply known as Mars, is trying to change that by offering free or low-cost soundscapes through his website at www.deadhousemusic.com. He's not banking much, but Mars says his inspiration for the project was born from a lifelong love of the genre.

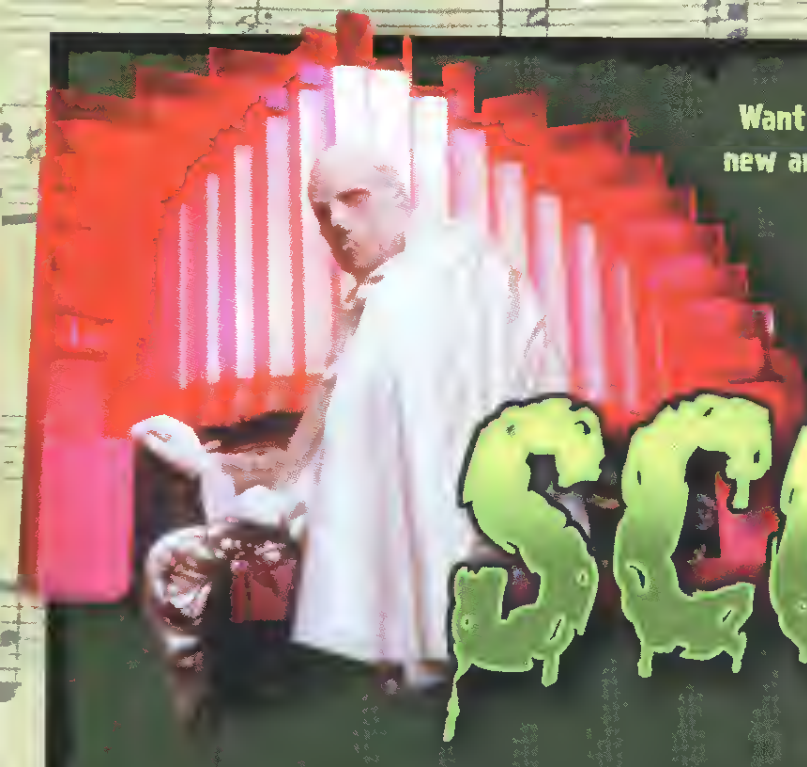
"I grew up staying up late watching horror movies and the *Creature Feature* show," Mars tells *Rue Morgue*. "I genuinely believe a film will sink or swim based on the soundtrack. Filmmakers have to mortgage their friggin' houses to just get movies made, so they end up using generic libraries for sound, but they are so tired, old and lame. To me, I'd much rather do a film I believe in and give them that extra effort just to make it better."

Using mostly organic samples created by everything from flutes to Japanese guitars, cats hissing and assorted symphonic orchestra pieces, Mars crafts original music from his modest home studio. The California-based multi-instrumentalist only opened his doors for business late last year, but he's already provided music for several low-budget productions, including *Sounds* (Orion Universal Productions) and the short *Ma Ma's Revenge* (Nel Harrison Studios). He's also recorded a sinister alternate soundtrack to the classic *Nosferatu* (the first eight minutes of which is available on his site) and created several nonspecific scores now available for download.

"People have asked me it I'd try to sell this stuff on CD, but honestly, it's a labour of love," he says. "I feel like a team player doing this; I contribute to something bigger than just my ego."

Heather Adler





Want to rattle your cars? Here's a smattering of new and reissued music to whimper in the dark by.

SCARE SCORES

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

Would *Jaws*, *The Omen* and *Halloween* have been even half as scary without their trademark music scores, each with its monster's own leitmotif? Hell no, as Steven Spielberg, Richard Donner and John Carpenter have all publicly testified on numerous occasions. Only the most hardcore fans, of course, find an entire album's worth of horror film music a particularly rewarding experience without a film to go with it, but hey, to each his own.

For what it's worth, I often hear the strains of Goblin or Jerry Goldsmith wefting from the boom box of doom when I stop by *Rue Morgue*'s office, but generally it's Nick Cave, Black Sabbath, Mozart or The Misfits playing.

Submitted for your approval: a sampling of this year's soundtrack releases, mainly from Perseverance, a label dedicated to reissuing film scores with comprehensive liner notes and richly-coloured artwork reproductions.

THE RING AND THE RING TWO

Music by Hans Zimmer, Henning Lohner and Martin Tillman

DECCA RECORDS

"D Minor is the saddest of all keys," said Nigel Tufnel in *This Is Spinal Tap*. Well fuck the irony, Brother Nigel was dead to doughnuts about D Minor, the key to slit your wrists by, and legions of music scholars will back him up. Is it just coincidence, then, that *The Ring* takes place in and around Seattle, home of bands who first popularized Drop-D tuning (*Alice In Chains*, *Soundgarden* et. al.) all those flannel-clad, self-pitying, heroin-enriched years ago?

Piano may carry *The Ring*'s best-known theme, but at the end of the rainy day, it's all about the cello, easily the saddest-sounding instrument known to mankind (clarinet and viola would be runners-up). The main theme is rounded out by double basses, percussion, harp, piano and celesta, fittingly evoking *The Ring*'s now-familiar forecast of bruised skies with intermittent downpours.

The album sports no liner notes to speak of beyond the general credits, so one can only guess at the influences, but the debts owed to Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells and Goblin's *Suspiria* theme are obvious. The references may have been intentional, and in many ways this pitch-black gem is superior to both of those influences. There are also oblique, fragmentary nods to Rod Gudino's favourite recurring riff of the last few centuries, the Dies Irei theme from the Latin Mass for the Dead, a familiar ditty that's haunted film scores from *The Shining* to *Friday the 13th* to *The Car* and probably hundreds more.

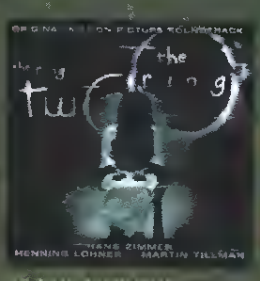
Like most horror music with a minimalist bent, this is not the product of a particularly broad harmonic palate, but it's mighty effective nonetheless, and idiomatically fitting for films that are both viscerally scary and deeply tragic.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

Music by Danny Zeitlin

PERSEVERANCE

For a lot of reasons, musical and otherwise, this the most fascinating of the re-releases. It's been a while since I last saw *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and I'd forgotten just how effective jazz pianist, psychiatrist and first-time film composer Danny Zeitlin's hyper-eclectic score truly was. The main title theme lasts barely four minutes and yet it's so densely constructed as to practically qualify as a mini-symphony, erupting with shrieking strings and stuttering, asymmetrical outbursts of brass and percussion, eventually dissolving into a darkly dreamy soundscape before fragmenting and











meandering off into that good night.

Elsewhere Zeitlin tosses in some Tangerine Dream-worthy synthscapes, gorgeous jazz-noir recalling Bernard Herrman's *Taxi Driver* score and, however briefly, the kind of chaotic, dangerous anti-music Tobe Hooper conjured for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The album is rounded out by a lengthy audio interview with the affable Zeitlin who reveals, among other things, the many reasons why he never scored another film.

THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES

Original score by Basil Kirchen

PERSEVERANCE

Eclecticism rules here, punctuating the campy (yet never completely comical) aspects of this much-loved 1971 Vincent Price classic. In the liner notes Basil Kirchen remarks that Price told him that he planned to play the role straight, and the composer decided to take the same approach with the music. For atmospheric purposes, the director would play pieces by composers as diverse as Sibelius, Barber and Vivaldi on the set while shooting (a technique also sometimes employed by David Lynch, who favours Shostakovich), and these influences seem to have insinuated themselves into Kirchen's own final score.

Because ownership of the film has changed so many times, Perseverance was unable to find the original master tapes, so the album has been compiled from a number of secondary sources (including the film itself) and the sound quality is often pretty dodgy. Nonetheless, fans should be grateful enough to have *Dr. Phibes* on CD that they'll cheerfully tolerate a bit of creaky lo-fi.

DR. PHIBES RISES AGAIN

Music by John Gale

PERSEVERANCE

Among the liner notes accompanying this reissue, there's a rather surprising revelation from director Robert Fuest: "The first *Phibes* was such a wonderful opportunity for music, but we blew it. I've never been so disappointed in my life. I re-edited an awful lot of music out of desperation from music libraries, but Basil Kirchen still got the credit for it." Fuest goes on to praise John Gale for coming to the rescue with an uncredited piece he wrote for the original, and maintains that Gale was hence a natural choice for the sequel.

Gale's score is more broadly campy than Kirchen's, deploying Wagner's leitmotif concept (each principal character having his or her own distinctive tune) and draws influence from a more diverse array of composers and styles, not to mention a rather deliriously overwrought cover of Somewhere Over The Rainbow. Unlike Perseverance's reissue of the soundtrack from the original *Phibes*, the master tapes for *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* were made available to the label, and the sound quality is naturally a damn sight better.



Invasion of the Body Snatchers: *Danny Zeitlin's inventive and eclectic score still scares.*

THE DEADLY SPAWN SPECIAL DEADLY DELUXE EDITION

Music by Michael Perilstein

PERSEVERANCE

Synapse's DVD reissue of the poverty-row alien splatter classic *The Deadly Spawn* (*RM#43*) hit shelves earlier this year, and now you can enjoy Michael Perilstein's equally poverty-row (read: way-cool) soundtrack while doing bong hits in the privacy of your own home.

As befits a film with a reputed budget of $20,000 (!), Perilstein's largely synth-and-flute score is the stuff of our Schizoid Cinephile's wettest dreams, and this time I mean that in a good way. For those unfamiliar with the film, Perilstein's music sounds rather like Goblin drunk off their asses in a damp basement recording covers of the *Halloween* theme and Fred Myrow's *Phantasm* music on an ancient four-track. Yes, it's that much fun.

Titles like Afternoon Of A Spawn, Spawn Lake and Spawn But Not Forgotten only add to the gleeful dumb-assery, and Perilstein has wisely refrained from editing out his (numerous) mistakes. Liner notes include an interview with FX guy/co-writer/producer John Dods, some humorous if obtuse musings from Perilstein, and the seemingly unrelated Asshology Horrorscope that has me seriously wondering if the creator hadn't been huffing the cleaning products when he wrote it.



NEKRONOLOGY

Music by Herman Kopp

Red Stream Inc.

Here are a few genuinely disturbing gore-scores, courtesy of German director Jorg Buttgereit's vilified low-dough shockers *Nekromantik*, *Nekromantik 2*, and *Der Todesking* (*The Death King*). Composer Herman Kopp's unwelcoming instrumentation wrings black bile from a cheerless cadence of violins, dingy Moog synthesizer and occasional gothic choir. Featuring a lung-soaked last gasp (Man Drowning Himself In Bathtub) and a handful of raw cannibalist lullabies to rock you gently to death, *Nekronology* is perhaps best summed up by opening cut The Loving Dead, a single torturous minute of diseased hysterical violins (think Wendy Carlos' creepy *Shining* score), which might be the sonic equivalent to having every inch of your skin stripped to the bone with a potato peeler. Simply put, Kopp's *Nekronology* will even make the hairs on top of the little hairs on your neck stand up.

Tomb Dragomir



SIXTEEN YEARS AFTER IT WAS INITIALLY RELEASED, JACK KETCHUM'S BREAKTHROUGH NOVEL REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT READS IN CONTEMPORARY GENRE LITERATURE, IN PART BECAUSE IT WAS BASED ON A TRUE STORY. NOW, KETCHUM'S TRAGIC TALE GETS A MASS-MARKET RE-RELEASE FROM LEISURE BOOKS.

CONCERNING THE GRIEVOUS CASE OF THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

Sylvia Marie Likens was only sixteen years old when she was beaten, burned, repeatedly kicked, thrown down the stairs, denied food, forced to eat her own vomit and feces, imprisoned and restrained while the phrase "I'm a prostitute and proud of it!" was branded into her stomach with a red-hot needle. Sounds like a segment from a particularly revolting splatter cheapie, but sadly, this story is real.

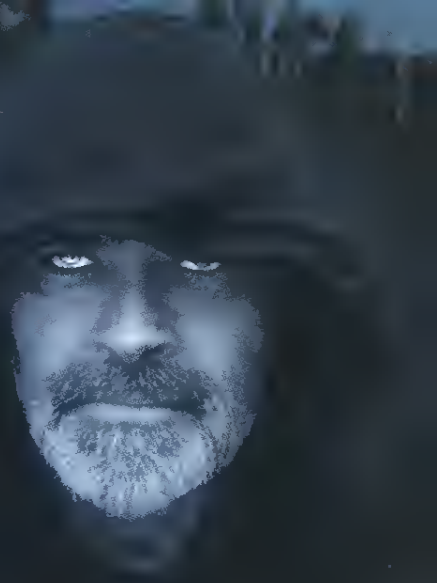
Forty years ago this year the young Likens suffered months of continually worsening torture at the hands of the woman who was hired to be her temporary guardian. To make things agonizingly worse, her forture was partaken of by a slew of minors who helped the elder indulge the full force of her savage, unhinged fury. On October 26, 1965, the girl's emaciated body finally succumbed to its wounds, focusing the eyes of a shocked America on the lower-class Indianapolis neighbourhood where, unbelievably, everyone seemed "in" on the abuse and no one tried to stop it.

In the decades that have passed since her death, numerous books (and even a stage play) have been written about the tragic crime. Five of these are fictionalized accounts inspired by the actual macabre events, the most notorious (particularly in genre circles) is Jack Ketchum's 1989 novel *The Girl Next Door* – a book that may have been lost in obscurity were it not for Overlook Connection, a small US press that kept it available as a pricey collector's edition hardcover in the '90s after its mismarketed initial release.

Now for the first time in over a decade and a half, Leisure Books is re-releasing Ketchum's landmark work as a mass-market paperback, expanded to include two bonus short stories (Do You Love Your Wife? and Returns) along with a very personal afterword by the author discussing his reasons for adapting such a black page in the history of American crime.

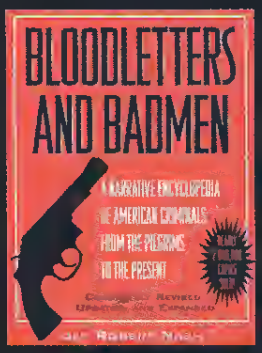
"This was a secret crime but an open secret, and ongoing, with half the neighbourhood kids in on it, and an adult as the orchestrator," Ketchum tells *Rue Morgue*, describing what initially peeked his interest in the case. "The adult was a female, doing





"This was a secret crime but an open secret, and ongoing, with half the neighbourhood kids in on it, and an adult as the orchestrator." – JACK KETCHUM

horrible violence toward another female, and it seemed to me that this was a total betrayal of her sex, and I wondered why in the world she would dream of doing it. Then there was the simple fact of a respected adult leading her own children and neighborhood kids into utter evil."



Ketchum remembers being haunted by the photo of Gertrude Baniszewski (Likens' guardian) in Jay Robert Nash's *Bloodletters and Badmen*, where he first read of the case. Perhaps that is why Ketchum cites *The Girl Next Door* as one of the easiest books he's ever written. He merely took the 1965 crime and wound the clock back to the '50s for his unique adaptation – merging the details of Likens' brutal torture with elements from his own boyhood, changing the setting from poverty row Indianapolis to a cul-de-sac in New Jersey, a mirror of his own childhood home.

"My mother had just died and left me my family home in Livingston, New Jersey," he explains. "When I was growing up there, it was on a dead-end street, surrounded by woods and brooks – very much the kind of isolated place where this kind of crime could have happened. I spent a lot of time there divesting myself of my mom's things and gradually it became clear that part of the story I wanted to tell in *The Girl Next Door* was about isolation and paranoia and the kind of underlay of fear that we grew up with in the '50s. So I added a kind of personal memory-play to the events."

That memory play comes out in striking prose, full of nostalgia for the summer of boyhood that sours in the slow conscious descent of David, its twelve-year-old narrator, into a voyeur and silent accomplice to the unimaginable.

David's doubts about the horrors he witnesses inflicted on Meg (in the Likens role) – by her aunt, cousins and various neighbourhood teenagers – are shoved aside by a potent mix of sexual curiosity, morbid fascination, fear, attraction and helplessness.

"The blueprint for the book was the crime itself," says Ketchum. "The tricky part, of course, was to determine just how much the narrator sees or doesn't see, and when and where to insert him into the action."

To that end, readers are introduced to the girls, their aunt and abuser Ruth Chandler, and the rest of the young abettors entirely through the memories of David, who relates and reflects on the story as an adult. Ruth, who becomes the childrens' guardian after a tragic auto accident kills both their parents, uses the "punishments" to dehumanize and objectify her young victim and, as her sociopathic descent continues, so does the vicious nature of her acts. By the latter part of the novel, Ruth is clearly deriving sexual pleasure from her sadistic behaviour and that of her teenage conspirators.

"I was interested in how authority figures can seduce and pervert us," Ketchum says, maintaining that he wanted readers to examine their own culpability and their own capacity to look away when faced with atrocity. "I was interested in the 'good Nazi.' I was interested in secrecy and hypocrisy. I was interested in the mysteries of sexual attraction and repulsion."

True to his intent, *The Girl Next Door* remains one of the most disturbing reads in the history of horror literature. And even though Ketchum admits to "softening" some of the tortures inflicted on the real-life victim (and having his narrator refuse to dish out a play-by-play in one instance), much of the violence is still brutally intact, including the vicious branding, though the wording in Ketchum's account is only half-burned (the rest is carved) into Meg's flesh in two-inch letters, and changed to the much more obscene "I fuck fuck me."

Perhaps simply too graphic and unapologetic in its depiction of abuse, particularly at the time of its 1989 publication, *Girl* was unofficially banned in Canada where bookstores were known to simply refuse to order it in for their customers. South of the border, the novel faced another problem altogether, one that has subsequently been corrected by Leisure for its 2005 re-release. Original publishers Warner Books – in a move of blatant mismarketing that virtually guaranteed that *Girl* would drift beneath the radar – slapped the hopelessly misleading image of a cheerleader with a skull-face on the cover in what was, as Ketchum notes, a direct rip-off of the dopey slasher movie *Return to Horror High*.

"One guy apologized to me at a signing a few years ago, saying that he used to run a bookstore and, because of the cover, placed it with his R.L. Stine novels. I told him he was lucky some pissed-off dad didn't come after him with a shotgun."



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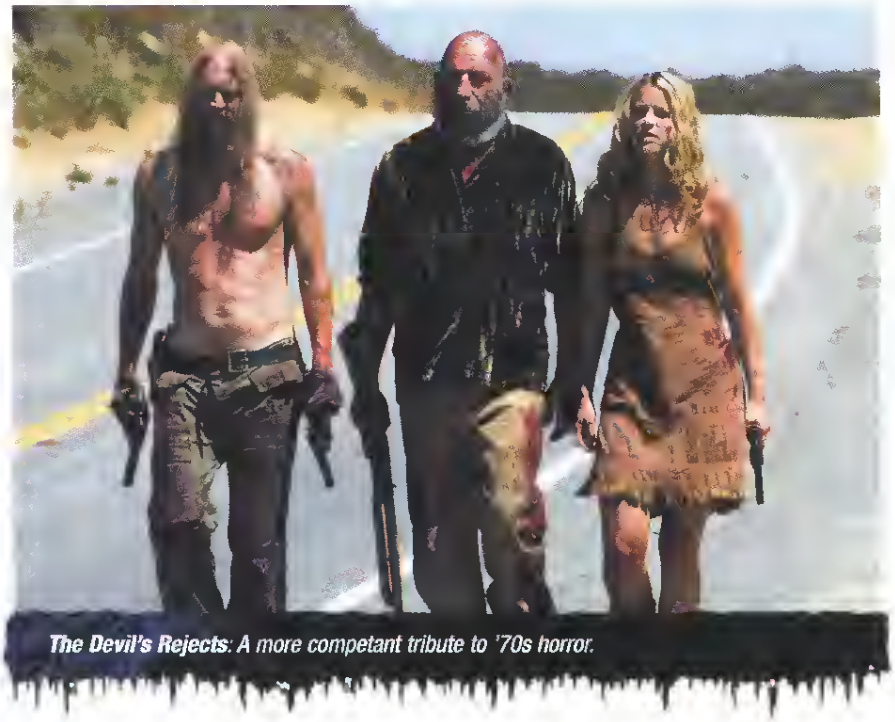
Film, Video, Dvd & Reissues

CINEMACABRE

SLAYING IN THE '70S

THE DEVIL'S REJECTS

Starring Bill Moseley, Sid Haig
and Sheri Moon Zombie
Written and directed by Rob Zombie
Lions Gate Films



***The Devil's Rejects**: A more competant tribute to '70s horror.*

Rob Zombie, like Quentin Tarantino before him, is a fan filmmaker, he makes films about other films. You don't accuse a director like that of ripping off, that's a given. The question is whether he rips off well, whether the borrowed pieces make something new or unique. Of course, back when *House of 1000 Corpses* came out, I thought things couldn't get worse. Even if you dug Zombie's carnival of grinning monsters, you can't deny the flick was little more than the product of a horror fan with $7 million dollars and not a single clue about telling a story.

News of a second film nevertheless sat well with us here at *Rue Morgue*, given our belief that those dire results were simply the result of inexperience. All Zombie needed was a few well-placed criticisms and a little advice to steer him in the right direction. Judging by how *The Devil's Rejects* turned out, I think we may have been right.

No, Zombie's latest doesn't add anything new to the genre, but it does miraculously play out like an actual movie; it has a storyline, a plot, and some mean-spirited gore – elements absent from the first film. And though his ongoing adoration for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* continues unabated, Zombie's decision to put his cast of killers on the road and ditch their dopey cartoonish mugging makes *The Devil's Rejects* the kind of film everyone thought *House* was gonna be – a retro-fied, nasty horror homage.

The flick picks up where the last one, er, "left off" with cops crashing in on the Firefly clan as they lounge in their dingy corpse-ridden house. Otis (Moseley) and Baby (Moon) duck bullets and book up with chicken champ Captain Spaulding (Haig, who thankfully scrubs off that goofy clown makeup in the first few minutes). While hiding out at a scrappy sunburnt motel, they torture a few well-intentioned rednecks, then flee to Spaulding's brother's place (grinning pimp Charlie Altamont played by Ken Force of Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*).

Along the way, there are kills and spills, some nasty road splatter and a sheriff (William Forsythe) who becomes as bloodthirsty as the cannibal family he's trying to track down. Some cameos by '70s horror vets PJ (*Halloween*) Soles, Michael (*Hills Have Eyes*) Berryman and Steve (*Helter Skelter*) Railsback keep us in a fanboy frame of mind, but all things told, the cameos are handled pretty deftly. On the downside, there are too many tasty but useless shots of Sheri Moon's ass, some artless music montages, and Zombie's myopic attempts to make his killers as cruel and inhuman as possible while also making them lovable and sympathetic.

But faced with two sides of the coin, my bet is *The Devil's Rejects* succeeds on feel, the sun-bleached SoCal desert, a cast of snarling, scummy characters and the grooving '70s rock – it's like some retro cartoon rendered on hot asphalt with bullets and blood. Zombie's gnarly homage to a gnarly decade of flicks may even prove he's graduated out of the music video – sort of. A little more and he may actually become a respected film director; he isn't there yet, but the road is open.

Rod Gudino

SLASHER EXTRAORDINAIRE

HIGH TENSION

Starring Cécile De France, Maiwenn
and Philippe Nahon
Directed by Alexandre Aja
Written by Alexandre Aja and Grégory Levasseur
Lions Gate Films

Call it *Haute Tension*, call it *High Tension*, the common denominator here is tension. This much-hyped French survivalist flick has finally been turned loose on North America after considerable delay (see *RM#37* – more than eighteen months ago) and, while suffering from an infuriating third act twist, questionable dubbing and the censors' scissors, it's still the kind of crackerjack horror show genre fans should support with open wallets.



Haute Tension: *A flawed but gritty slasher pic.*

The plot has Marie (De France) and Alex (Marwenn) retreat to Alex's parents' isolated farmhouse to study law away from the hustle and bustle of Paris. Marie is clearly in love with her oblivious friend, whose only thoughts are of the next boy in her life. Enter a brutal serial killer in dirty coveralls (Nahon of Gaspar Noe's *I Stand Alone* and *Irreversible*) who slaughters Alex's family while Marie looks on helplessly. He then kidnaps Alex, with Marie following in hopes of rescuing her – a bloody showdown is inevitable.

Then the bottom drops out. The plot twist, which some critics have termed a betrayal, did not ruin *High Tension* for me, but it is incredibly annoying. Lynch and Argento can get away with employing dream logic because their films function in worlds which aren't quite ours. But director Alexandre Aja's debut is a gritty, realistic work that seems to exist in the reality you and I experience every day, hence the horror of the brutal deaths suffered by Alex's innocent family. But to suddenly change the rules the way Aja and co-writer Grégory Levasseur do... all I can say is *merde*!

As for the changes that transformed *Haute Tension* into *High Tension*, if they bring the film a wider audience, then fine. Onscreen gore has been slashed, so to speak, by about a minute, making the kills less brutal (no doubt an Uncensored Director's Cut DVD will restore the spurting, headless corpses, chainsawed bodies and deleted blows to the head). More problematic, though, is the dubbing. It's not atrocious, but the original French-language track works much better. And why do the characters speak French sometimes, English other times? It's flawed, but *High Tension* is still well worth watching. And that, mes amis, c'est incroyable.

Sean Plummer

SCARED SICK

INFECTION

Starring Koichi Sato, Masanobu Takashima and Mari Hoshino
Written and directed by Masayuki Ochiai
Based on the story by Ryoichi Kimizuka
Lions Gate Films

Does your doctor really care about you? *Infection*, the first episode in horror producer Taka Ichise's (*Ringu*, *Ju-On*) six-part J-Horror Theater series, begs the question as it plays upon fears of an untreatable infection, being let down by an overburdened underfunded medical system, and everyone's general unease around hospitals. Director Ochiai (*Parasite Eve*), working from his own script, skillfully manipulates those various anxieties to craft a creepy flick that, thankfully, doesn't rely on dead, long-haired women to deliver its scares.

The action is set in the nearly bankrupt Central Hospital where most of the nursing staff quit weeks ago and emergency calls from frantic paramedics go unanswered. The remaining staff struggle to care for patients as supplies dwindle and nerves fray. Tensions come to a head when a misheard ER instruction results in the death of a patient – it's blatant malpractice and the attending doctors and nurses, with varying degrees of reluctance, agree to cover up their crime.

Meanwhile, against the protests of attending physician Dr. Akiba (Sato), paramedics dump off a mysterious patient in the ER who is literally being consumed by his ailment. Akiba is blackmailed into researching the patient's infection by the ambitious head doctor Akai (Shiro Sano), who may or may not have overheard Akiba and the others conspiring to get rid of the dead patient. But the infection, which turns its victims into green goo, won't be contained and spreads through all the conspirators, provoking hallucinations and self-destructive behaviour before a grisly death.



Infection gets a bit messy towards the end – in more ways than one – as a major plot twist makes suspension of disbelief difficult. But the characters seem real, the mood is super-creepy (credit cinematographer Hatsuaki Masui) and the movie's take on how a virus is transmitted is pretty original. Watch it with a handful of vitamins.

Sean Plummer



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Dominion: Prequel to the Exorcist: *Stellan Skarsgard versus Pazuzu, round two.*

WHATEVER POSSESSED THEM?

DOMINION: PREQUEL TO THE EXORCIST

Starring Stellan Skarsgard,
Gabriel Mann and Clara Bellar
Directed by Paul Schrader
Written by Caleb Carr and William Wisher
Warner Brothers

On the off chance you haven't heard this one, once upon a time there was a fourth *Exorcist* in pre-production. Liam Neeson was to play Father Lancaster Merrin – the legendary priest in William Peter Blatty's 1971 masterpiece novel (and William Friedkin's subsequent 1973 film version), *The Exorcist*.

This prequel – set 30 years earlier – tells the tale of Merrin's initial encounter with the demon Pazuzu. Caleb Carr and William Wisher co-wrote the screenplay while John Frankenheimer jumped on board to direct. But Neeson left after his option expired, and Frankenheimer, unfortunately, expired himself. Director Paul Schrader (of *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull* fame) completed the film, but the studio shelved it for not being scary enough. The screenplay was reworked by Alexi Hawley and Schrader was replaced by Renny Harlin (*Die Hard 2*), to make it flashier.

The result was *Exorcist: The Beginning* and it was, sadly, terrible. Tailored to today's attention deficit audiences, the film's incoherent story, poor CGI effects and blasé confrontation between Merrin and Pazuzu (who in this version possesses the village's female doctor) are ridiculous. Despite this, it earned enough that Warner Brothers released *Dominion* to select theatres.

Sharing essentially the same plot as *The Beginning*, it also features Merrin (played again by Stellan Skarsgard), who can't cope with his role in a World War II atrocity. He goes into solitude in British-occupied East Africa, where on an archeological expedition he uncovers an underground temple, and the evil spirit within it. In this version Merrin must save a deformed young man from the demon (which resembles a Cirque de Soleil reject).

The film's poorly constructed story attempts to scare by exploring the psychological struggle of good versus evil. This worked well in the original *Exorcist* because the plot and imagery were so strong, but here you're more likely to giggle at badly rendered CGI hyenas.

Warner should have included *Dominion*'s best clips – including a dream sequence where we see the ghoul-faced Captain Howdy from the original film – as a bonus feature on *The Beginning* DVD, because the rest will make you want to puke pea soup.

Robert V. Conte

BASTING THE TURKEY

SEED OF CHUCKY

Starring Brad Dourif, Jennifer Tilley
and Billy Boyd
Written and directed by Don Mancini
Universal

Released during *Rue Morgue*'s publishing hiatus last year, *Seed of Chucky* slipped under our collective reviewing radar. So when the stork dropped it off at the *RM* office, it was tossed my way like a broken condom out the back of a taxi cab window.



In the series' fourth film, *Bride of Chucky* (*RM#5*), the malevolent doll uttered the prophetic words "I'll be back; I always come back" before dying in a graveyard alongside his bride Tiffany, who gave birth just in time for the child to leap up and take a bite out of a cop's face.

Fast-forward six years and the orphaned child – looking like a throwaway from Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds* and voiced by Billy Boyd (happy hobbit Pip-

Continued on page 50



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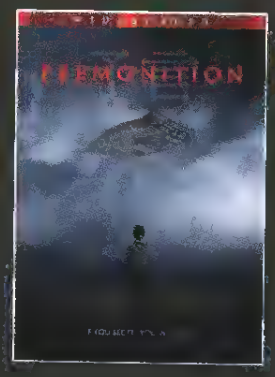
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A CREEPY NEWSFLASH



PREMONITION

Starring Hiroshi Mikami, Noriko Sakai and Hana Inoue
Directed by Norio Tsuruta
Written by Noboru Takagi and Norio Tsuruta
Lions Gate Home Entertainment

Unless you've completely ignored the Asian horror boom of the past few years, you've probably noticed that nearly every J-horror film bears a disturbing similarity to Hideo Nakata's groundbreaking and terrifying *Ringu* (1998). While this genre dies a derivative death, *Premonition* (a.k.a. *Yogen*) is being touted as the next big thing. But should it be?

Directed by Norio Tsuruta, (*Ring 0: Birthday*), *Premonition* plays with the idea of a newspaper that tells the reader when his or her loved ones will die. Pulling his family to the side of the road one night, professor Hideki Satomi (Mikami) finds just such a thing, indicating his daughter will die that very day in a car accident. Ironically, he watches in horror as an oncoming vehicle slams into his, killing her instantly. Years later he gets another chance to save those around him when the "Newspaper of Terror" makes its return, but he learns there are dire consequences for doing so.

There are (almost) no spooky long-haired dead girls to be found in Tsuruta's film, but he does borrow from the original *Ringu*'s quieter approach to the genre. *Premonition* is that rare drawn-out intense thriller that succeeds mainly because it exudes constant unease. Still, one can't help noticing the similarity of the story to other films, most recently Takashi Miike's own tribute to J-Horror, *One Missed Call*. In addition, using a newspaper as the harbinger of terror is problematic because it's hard to make a flying newspaper menacing.

But where the film really stumbles is in its payoff, as Tsuruta suddenly shifts from creating quiet dread to spastic jump cuts, which occurs when Satomi experiences a dozen different nightmare scenarios after he interferes with the newspaper's foretelling. The tear-jerker finale leaves things on a downright cheesy note, and not just because Mikami overacts like he's playing drunken charades.

You can't deny *Premonition*'s ability to keep you on the edge of your seat, but you can't help feel it should have been so much more than a decent horror flick that happens to be from Japan.

Aaron Lupton



pin of the *Lord of the Rings* movies) – has grown up imprisoned in an English circus sideshow, thinking his name is Shitface. After seeing his long-lost parents on TV, he escapes to Hollywood and uses a special medallion to bring them back to life. The newly reunited family undergoes some birthing pains as it's discovered that their progeny isn't anatomically correct and they can't decide whether it's a boy or girl, so they call it Glen/Glenda in an obvious nod to Ed Wood. Tiffany vows it's their parental obligation to raise their son/daughter properly and that means no more killing. But following a plot to impregnate actress Jennifer Tilley (who, of course, voices Tiffany) involving muppet masturbation and a turkey baster, a bloody family feud ensues.

Though not the strongest of the Chucky movies, mildly entertaining one-liners, self-referential humour, a John Waters cameo and the fiery death of Britney Spears make this one worth seeing. The DVD is packed with hilarious extras like the Family Hell-iday Slide Show, and there's even an unrated, extended version of the film available. Writer/director Don Mancini, who's been involved in some capacity with every Chucky film, has questionably moved the underlying focus of the series from horror to horror-comedy, but I, for one, can hardly wait for *Child's Play 6: Divorce Court of Chucky*.

Last Chance Lance

MORE MARVEL MULCH



MAN-THING

Starring Matthew Le Nevez, Rachel Taylor and Jack Thompson
Directed by Brett Leonard
Written by Hans Rodionoff
Lions Gate Films

Seemingly a barely disguised rip-off of DC Comic's walking compost heap *Swamp Thing*, Marvel's *Man-Thing* (Hans Rodionoff) never saw as much popularity with readers as Swampy did, but with the recent success of *Spider-Man* and the *X-Men* films, Marvel is going through movies quicker than the Hulk through pants, such that even Man-Thing is getting in on the action.

This poorly scripted horror/comic hybrid has very little to do with Marvel's comic, though, instead leaving us with a





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Man-Thing: *A weak Marvel adaptation*

laborious plot about a small-town sheriff (Le Nevez) out to impress his feisty love interest (Taylor). While investigating an epidemic of gruesome murders in a nearby swamp, the plucky pair learns that the deaths may be the handiwork of a fabled Native American guardian summoned after a corrupt oil company started drilling on sacred land. When Man-Thing finally makes his CGI-assisted appearance an hour later, he's completely unrecognizable from the comics, and demonstrates a lack of depth and heroism that seems to characterize the film as a whole.

But *Man-Thing* is much less than just a muck-drenched superhero adaptation, it's also a pretty bad horror film. Creepy art direction and lighting attempt to tap into the eerie tone of the comics, but director Brett Leonard (*The Lawnmower Man*) is determined to force what should have been a B-movie creature feature into a cookie-cutter slasher flick. In the comics, Man-Thing is able to secrete an acid that burns all who are afraid of him, but this film reduces him to a mindless killer who indiscriminately drives living tree branches through the vital organs of anyone who enters his domain, whether evil industrialist or topless teen.

With insincere nods to environmentalism, a completely implausible romance and outrageous Southern stereotypes, *Man-Thing* literally gets bogged down by a lazy script, making it easily the worst comic book film since the embarrassing *Captain America*.

Paul Corupe

GOING UP

HELLEVATOR: THE BOTTLED FOOLS

Starring Luchino Fujisaki, Yoshiichi Kawada and Ryosuke Koshiba
Written and directed by Hiroki Yamaguchi
Tokyo Shock

Miniscule budget, scant professional filmmaking experience and zero star power – none of it prevented Hiroki Yamaguchi from creating this inspired slice of minimalist horror madness. Then some idiot North American marketing department decided to rename the film *Hellevator* (in Japan it's known as *Gusha no binzume*), but look past the cheesy title, because this movie proves raw talent and a brain can produce what millions in special effects cannot.

Set in some dystopian future world, almost the entire film takes place in an elevator that moves its passengers between different levels of a city stacked on one another. When an explosion caused by telepathic lead Luchino (Fujisaki, apparently using her real name) strands the passengers of one of these lifts in the middle of nowhere, allowing two transported prisoners (one a serial rapist) to escape their shackles, the paranoia, mystery, horror, screaming, and gore begins.



Set in the confines of four walls, some obvious comparisons to *Cube* can be made, but *Hellevator* is not that complex of a story, preferring instead to simply see what happens when serial killers, biological weapons, anarchist terrorists and secret police are thrown together and forced to survive for an hour – all while Luchino's memories of her violent and haunted past bubble to the surface. Expectedly, pandemonium and bloodshed are the result.

But the movie isn't all violence; it's also about style, boasting striking design featuring a combination of outdated technology and futuristic costumes, giving it the feel of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *City of Lost Children* or *Red Dwarf* on acid. Although some forgiveness is necessary for the film's digital video limitations, stylistically it's pro.

Tokyo Shock's DVD release comes equipped with a short making-of featurette, plus interviews with the cast and crew, giving viewers an inside look at Yamaguchi's original vision. After seeing *Hellevator*, I can't wait to see what the guy can do with a million bucks.

Aaron Lupton

MOTHER RUSSIA'S MISTAKE

NIGHT WATCH

Starring Konstantin Khabensky, Vladimir Menshov and Valery Zolotukhin
Written and directed by Timur Bekmambetov
Original story by Sergei Lukyanenko
Fox Searchlight Pictures

If *Night Watch* is any indication, Hollywood has torn down the last shred of the Iron Curtain and tossed its wretched seed all over the face of Mother Russia. Sadly, the Russians are lapping it up, because this wannabe *Matrix/Blade/Star Wars/Underworld* special effects wank earned more in that country than blockbusters like *Spider-Man 2* and *Lord of the Rings*.

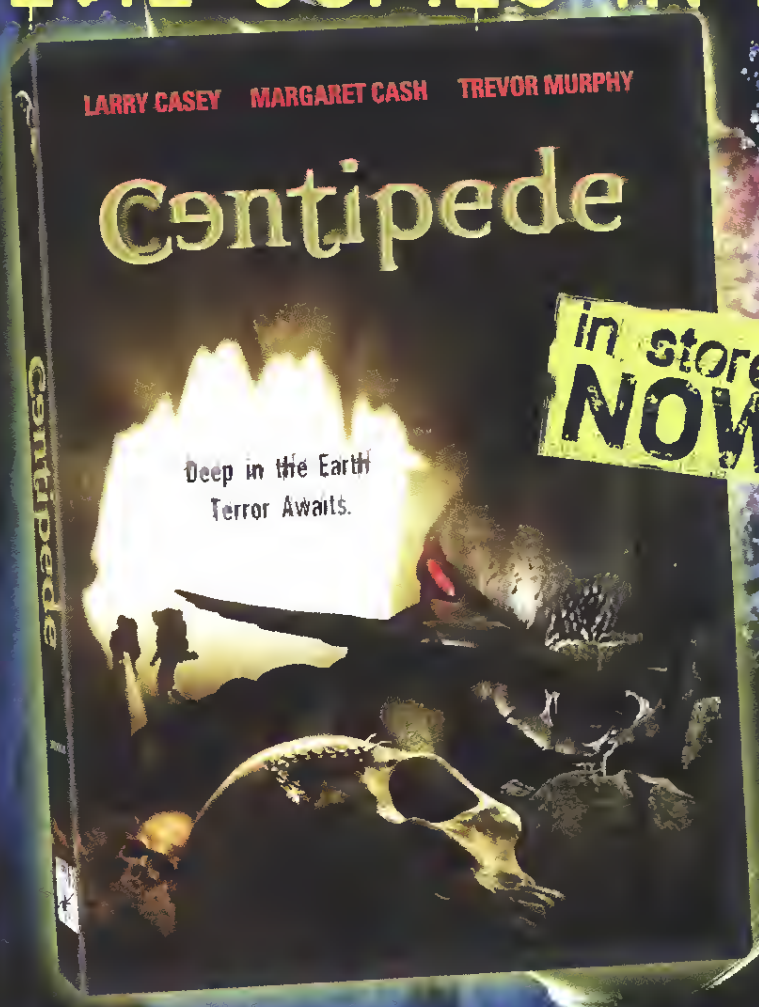
By now you've heard about the $4-million Russian action-horror movie, which was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars, and how it's as slick as any mega-budget American movie. It most definitely is, but it's also as cliché and soulless, and a lot more convoluted.

Taking place in a world where supernatural forces do battle just under humanity's nose, the film pits the Night Watch (forces of light that include shape-shifters and mind readers) against the Day Watch (forces of darkness who are vampires).





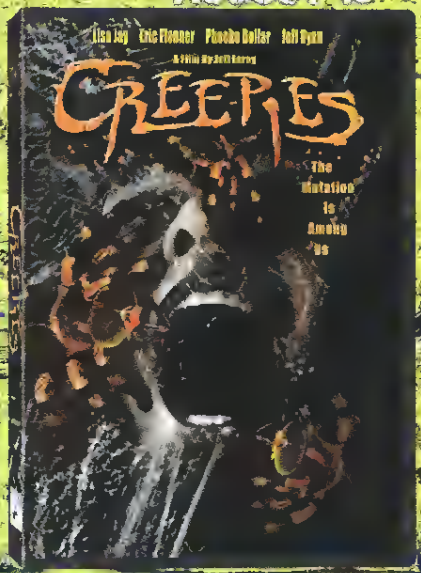
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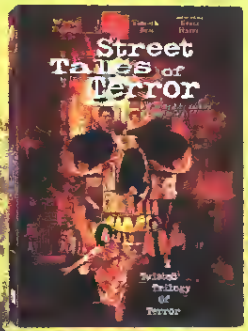
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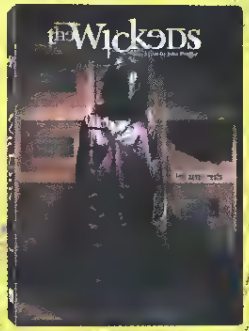


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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GETS RIPPED OFF!

SAUCY SAVINI

THE RIPPER

United Home Video



We've all done things that we aren't proud of. Hell, I once flipped burgers at McDonald's, but I sure didn't commit any of it to video for my peers to taunt me with many years later. Alas, Tom Savini can't say the same. Case in point, the re-released 1985 crapfest, *The Ripper*. When a professor teaching a course on serial killers finds a ring said to have been the Ripper's, he slips it on and becomes possessed by Saucy Jack's spirit. Murder ensues, with Savini as the titular Ripper prancing around in a top hat, cape and goofy contact lenses, spouting lines like some wigged-out Will Shatner. Good for a laugh... and a few tears.

Body Count: 6

References To Other, Better Horror Movies: 15

LUNDGREN LETS ONE RIP

JILL THE RIPPER

Columbia Tri-Star



You haven't lived until you've seen Dolph Lundgren strung upside down in Japanese bondage gear, licking a dominatrix's boots and whimpering like a baby. Luckily, you can see it all in his latest: *Jill The Ripper*, a.k.a. *The Bone Ripper*, a.k.a. *The Leatherwoman*, a.k.a. *Tied Up*, a.k.a. *Jill Rips*. Lundgren plays a bitter ex-cop investigating the bizarre murder of his brother only to find himself chasing down a latex-clad temptress in a red Santo mask who's leaving a trail of mutilated men in her wake. Other than the aforementioned ludicrous S&M scene, this turkey is a definite must-miss and features probably the most clumsy hotel sex scene ever.

Body Count: 6

Rope Bondage Scenes: 8

JACK THE HEAD TRIPPER

RIPPER 2: LETTER FROM WITHIN

Velocity Home Entertainment



The equally disappointing sequel to the disappointing *Ripper: Letter From Hell* (*RM#23*), has main character Molly (now living in a psych ward) traveling to Europe to test out a new therapeutic drug. The other patients in the study are all young, pretty pyromaniacs, psychos and perverts, who naturally get sliced up Ripper-style. And in a twist-within-a-twist, Molly discovers they're all living in a drug-induced fantasy world, which is in *her* head, as she never actually left the asylum. Confused? Wondering what any of this has to do with Jack the Ripper? So are we.

Body Count: 16

Girls Killed While In Panties: 5

Last Chance Lance



After battling each other they reach a fragile truce in which they agree to allow humans to pick their own paths through good and evil.

Enter Anton (Khabensky), who tries to have his cheating wife's unborn child aborted through magic. It works, but in the process he discovers he has the power to see into the future. Flash forward to where, for some reason, he's investigating a boy that the vampires are after, which somehow embroils him in an apocalypse prophecy about "The Great One" that may see the dark side win. If there wasn't enough confusing bullshit afloat, there's also a plane crash, a tornado and a woman who's a harbinger of misfortune.

Although the film looks about twenty times bigger than its budget, and boasts some incredible comic book-influenced subtitles, its masturbatory style and utterly confusing plot makes it North America's sci-fi-action movie bitch. Most of the potentially interesting horror elements are overshadowed by goofy dialogue, cheesy heroic posturing and a buttload of pointless CG effects – notably a bus flying over traffic and landing on its wheels (because that's cool!). Eventually you even forget the baddies are vampires.

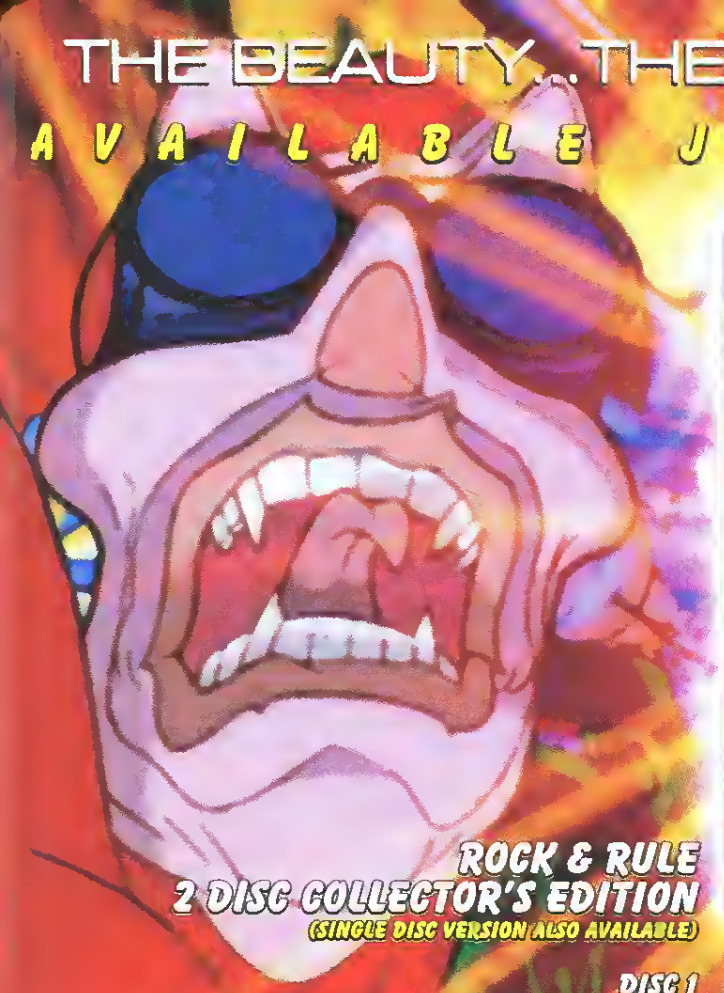
Somebody explain to writer/director Timur Bekmambetov – before he makes the two planned sequels – the virtues of undead bloodsucking over Hollywood dick-sucking.

Dave Alexander



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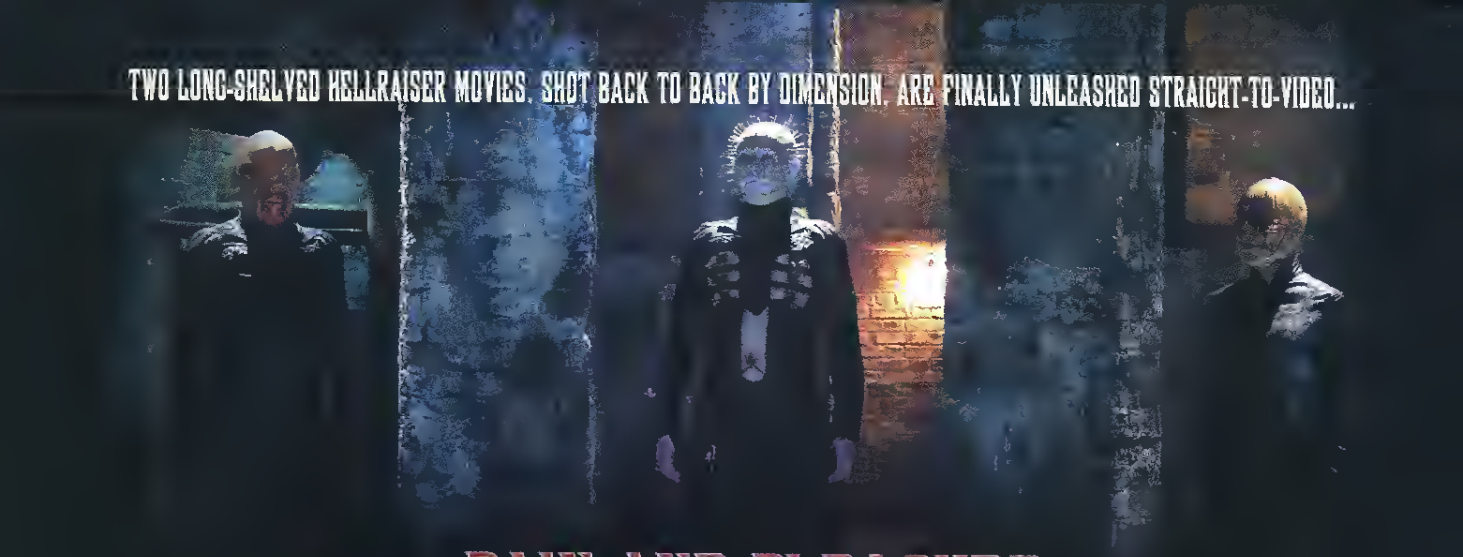
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PAIN AND PLEASURE

DIVISIBLE

BY JOSEPH O'BRIEN

Jesus wept, are there really eight *Hellraiser* movies out there now? I stopped counting after Kevin Yagher's ambitious *Hellraiser: Bloodline* (1996) was strangled at birth by its producers and left to die of neglect in a multiplex dumpster. Two more – *Inferno* (2000) and *Hellseeker* (2002) – followed and slipped under the cinematic radar, going straight-to-video. The latest entries in the Clive Barker-created universe (foster parented by the sometimes incapable Rick Bota) bypassed even that route, sitting on Dimension's shelf gathering dust until this month, where they have been released due to a company shake-up.

While the concept of extra-dimensional S&M fetishes may have been shocking, even subversive, in the 1980s, overexposure and collective cultural sphincter-loosening have depleted much of the Cenobite's power. Nevertheless, Barker's Lament Configuration mythos lends itself well to anthology-style stories, and the sequels (not to mention the much-missed Epic comic series) have embraced this idea, if more by accident than design. The results have been, unsurprisingly, a mixed bag, and these newest entries are no different.

HELLRAISER: DEADER

Starring Doug Bradley, Kari Wuhrer and Paul Rhys
Directed by Rick Bota
Written by Neal Marshall Stevens and Tim Day
Dimension Films



Kari Wuhrer stars in *Hellraiser: Deader* as a self-destructive investigative journalist. When she's shown a videotape depicting a young girl's suicide and seeming resurrection by messianic leader Winter (Rhys, looking like the love child of Kyle MacLachlan and Malcolm McDowell), she heads out to uncover a cult of "Deaders" (explaining the otherwise stupid-sounding title), and soon finds there are things out of even her depth.

Unbelievably, *Deader* is actually pretty good. While Wuhrer will never be mistaken for a great actress (her snakebait turn in *Anaconda* remains her thespian peak), she keeps her emotionally-wounded character credibly vulnerable, resisting the urge to overplay a tough chick persona. Director Bota (*They*, *Hellseeker*) builds an atmosphere of isolation and dread, reinforced by some oppressively gothic Bucharest locations.

What *Deader* doesn't have is much to do with *Hellraiser*, which is both the best and worst thing about it. The puzzle box Wuhrer inevitably finds and the sporadic Pinhead appearances are just window dressing on a story that is, in fact, much more interesting without them. The film reeks of an original script with some of the iconography grafted on; it's a competent, if inelegant patch job, but the film succeeds in spite of those elements, not because of them. Those in search of hardcore Cenobite action are sure to be disappointed. I just want to know who thought *Hellraiser 7* was in any way a surer commercial bet than something new.

HELLRAISER: HELLWORLD

Starring Doug Bradley, Lance Henriksen and Katheryn Winnick
Directed by Rick Bota
Written by Joel Soisson and Carl Dupré
Dimension Films



Lance Henriksen in a *Hellraiser* movie? Great idea... at least it would have been circa 1988. Since then, both the *Hellraiser* series and Lance's career have vanished into the Blockbuster back racks. I guess it was only a matter of time before they collided.

In *Hellworld*, hitting shelves in September, Henriksen plays a character identified only as "The Host", a role with challenges that might better have suited an actor with the chops of, say, Bruce Payne (king of the straight-to-video genre sequel). Despite his obvious overqualification, Lance doesn't phone it in – he is still Lance Fucking Henriksen. But you can't escape the sense that he's just going through the motions on this one. And frankly, I can't blame him, it's more than the film deserves.

Screenwriters Joel Soisson and Carl Dupré, whose resumes read like a list of "The Franchises Audiences Forgot", not only scrape the bottom of the barrel here, they claw it until their fingernails split. Transforming anything into a self-referencing meta-text, the sort of thing where a gratuitous tit shot is immediately followed by a character remarking; "Heh, gratuitous tit shot", is a pretty sure sign that your idea well is bone dry (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, I'm looking at your overrated little penis-nose here). Having characters wear Pinhead T-shirts and actually refer to Bradley's character as "Pinhead" is so sad and pathetic that just watching *Hellworld* all the way through feels like a pity fuck.

STREET TRASH is coming to MELT YOUR BRAIN!



In the sleazy, foreboding world of winos, derelicts and drifters in lower Manhattan, two young runaways – Fred (MIKE LACKEY) and his young brother, Kevin (MARK SFERRAZZA), live in a tire hut in the back of a vast auto wrecking yard.

Life is hard for these two, but by far the most lethal threat to the boys is the case of Tenafly Viper in Ed's liquor store widow. Ed found the cheapo wine behind a wall in his basement. The stuff's forty years old, and its gone bad... real bad! Anyone who drinks it melts within seconds! And it's only a dollar a bottle!! The bums are lining up for their deaths like moths at a flame, and Fred is standing right there among them.

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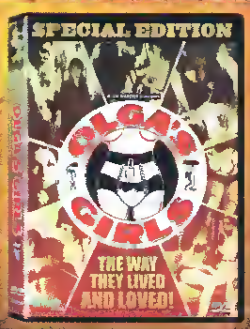
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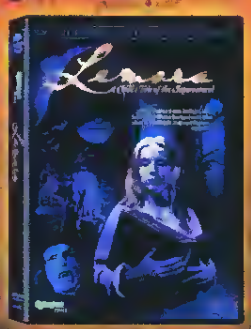
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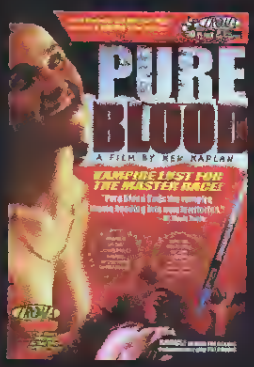
VAN HELSING'S NIGHT OFF



BY LIISA LADOUCEUR

PURE BLOOD

Starring Marius Mayers, Amanada Lane and Carl Beukes
Written and directed by Kenneth Kaplan
Troma



Who said you can't use vampires as a political outlet? This five-year-old South African film from first-time director Ken Kaplan is one of the most unique vampire films out there. A thoughtful, gore-speckled dark comedy, *Pure Blood* offers pointed commentary on post-Apartheid politics. To drive his point home like a sharpened wooden stake, Kaplan uses all the hot buttons: white supremacy, domestic violence, incest, addiction and, of course, zombies!

Young police rookie Fanus gets a visit from a long-lost half-brother, Eugene, who might actually be screwing his mother Gertrude, and might also be an alcoholic, but is most certainly a jerk. Things go very wrong when their dead father, a sinister general under the old racist regime, reappears and demands Fanus' "pure blood" in order to populate a hoard of undead white guys and take back the country.

Despite the promising premise and solid acting all around, *Pure Blood* is perhaps the most boring title ever released under the Troma team stamp. The family drama is played out at an agonizingly slow pace for the first half of the film, like those dreary British productions about sad working class folks going nowhere. If you can keep your interest up through 40 minutes of quiet nothingness, there are rewards, though. All of a sudden, Gertrude kills herself, is reanimated, and things start to get weird.

From here on in comes a faster-paced series of silly events involving a pack of annoying newbie vampires (including a doctor and nurse, for you medical fetishists) who shoof up, drink blood and plot to take over the town by way of plasma-poisoned baked goods, all unbeknownst to clueless, freckled-faced Fanus.

So, *Pure Blood* starts off too slowly and then gets too stupid. If also requires more thinking and patience than I think most Troma viewers are willing to put in, for such a low flesh-to-monologue ratio anyway. But Kaplan's a talented guy and this is a fairly interesting take on quest for eternal life.

VAMPIRES: THE TURNING

Starring Patrick Bachau, Stephanie Chao and Meredith Monroe
Directed by Marty Weiss
Written by D.B. Farmer and Andy Hurst
Sony Pictures

Vampires: The Turning (originally titled *Vampires 3: Temple of Blood*) is some kind of sequel to John Carpenter's *Vampires*, but apart from brief appearances by a few crossbow and winch-toting vampire hunters, it really has nothing to do with the series. I'm not sure why Carpenter didn't grant a "presents" connection, because, as straight-to-DVD vampire movies go, *The Turning* is a cut (throat) above.

Amanda (Monroe) gets all pouty when boyfriend Connor (Bauchau) – a lifelong muay thai enthusiast – wants to watch bloody muay thai matches while vacationing in Thailand. Well, duh. She storms off, gets kidnapped by the Thai bloodsuckers and – bang! – Connor is on a quest to release her from these mysterious nightwalkers that involves penetrating creepy lairs and then penetrating Song Neng, the sexy lead vampire who belongs to another, more sentimental clan.



Bauchau was obviously cast for his hard body and impressive martial arts moves, but whenever he opens his mouth he's embarrassingly stiff (not totally his fault: the dialogue is bad). His, er, stiffness comes in handy though when he simply must get it on with Song Neng in order to save Amanda. Yes, that's right. The guy has (gratuitous and strangely edited) sex with the beautiful vampire in order to garner superpowers so he can save his girlfriend. Go ahead and try that excuse yourself some time.

Besides that bit of ridiculousness, *The Turning* is a decent, fast-paced action flick that's thrifty with the cornball effects and has roots in genuine Thai vampire mythology. Like a combination *Lost Boys* and *Indiana Jones*, it's a bit lightweight on horror, but it's a much better option for easy, cheesy vampire fare than *Blade 3*. And, unlike the first straight-to-DVD *Vampires* sequel, there's no Bon Jovi. Whew!

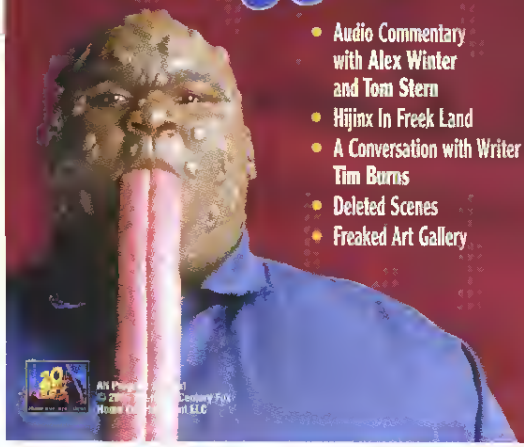
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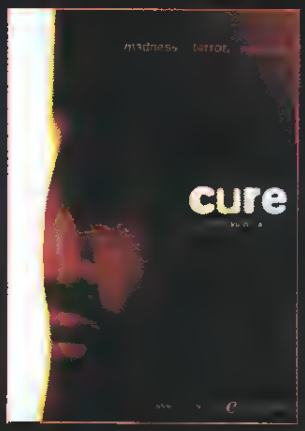




With a pending North American remake of his sombre masterpiece *Kairo* (2001), KIYOSHI KUROSAWA is the next Japanese horror director poised to terrorize the world. Here's a look at some of his most highly-regarded films, recently released by HOME VISION ENTERTAINMENT.

JAPAN'S WEIRD GENIUS

by The Gore-met



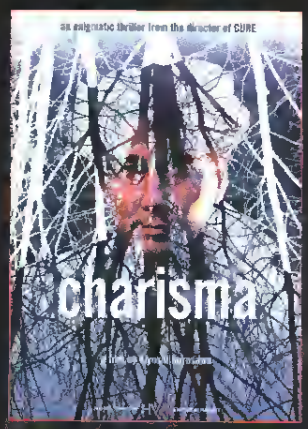
CURE (1997) DVD

Starring Koji Yakusho,
Masato Hagiwara, Tsuyoshi Ujiki
Written and directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa

Cure was the film festival hit that introduced Kiyoshi Kurosawa to international audiences and is widely heralded as his masterpiece. Although part of the wave of superhuman serial killer films popular around the globe in the mid-'90s, it is best described as a cross between Michael Mann's criminally underrated *Manhunter* (1986) and Larry Cohen's *God Told Me To* (1976).

It makes sense on paper: Takanabe (Yakusho) is a cop overwhelmed by a series of grisly murders committed by ordinary people for little apparent motive. The only links between the crimes are a wandering, abnormally inquisitive amnesiac and a grisly X carved into the victims' throats. Takanabe's subsequent apprehension and interrogation of the enigmatic stranger threatens his very sanity.

Now if only this film were that conventional. Kurosawa's disregard for narrative logic is both confounding and tantalizing. The writer/director never provides answers for all the questions his films raise; he provides the pieces, the audience is left to sort out his puzzle.



CHARISMA (1999) DVD

Starring Koji Yakusho,
Hiroyuki Ikeuchi, Ren Dsugi
Written and directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa

Charisma (*Karisuma*) is an eccentric film that defies categorization, but one at ease within the folds of fantastic cinema. Yabuike (Yakusho) is a big city cop who has lost his sense of purpose. After a botched hostage situation, he is put on forced leave and seeks solitude in a dying forest dominated by a mysterious tree. He is quickly embroiled in a Byzantine power struggle between those who would nurture the tree, and those who would destroy it.

Dubbed an eco-thriller but structured like a spaghetti western with science fiction overtones and moments of shocking violence, *Charisma* is a quirky existentialist film in the vein of Michele Soavi's *Dellamorte Dellamore* (1994) but without the zombies. Like that film, *Charisma* is ambiguous and unpredictable. Of particular note is the beautiful cinematography, which successfully transplants Kurosawa's trademark decay aesthetic to nature.

SÉANCE (2000) DVD

Starring Koji Yakusho, Jun Fubuki,
Written and directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa

Given his penchant for atmosphere, it was perhaps inevitable that Kurosawa would wade into the then-refreshing wave of supernatural potboilers inspired by *Ringu* (1997)/*The Sixth Sense* (1999). Billed as a remake of the 1961 theatrical crime thriller *Séance On a Wet Afternoon*, the source novel was retooled for modern audiences, which constituted the addition of dead girls with features obscured by stringy black hair visible only to the protagonists.

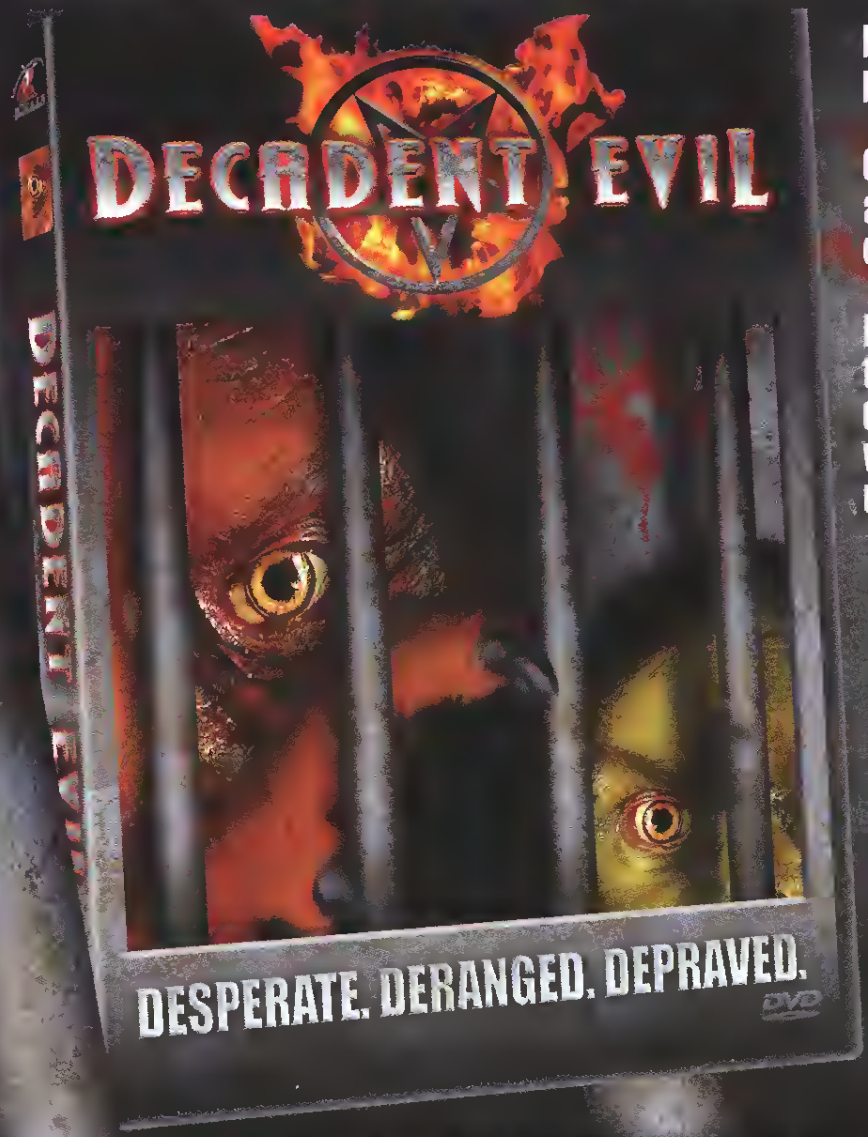
Junco (Fubuki) is an amateur psychic involved in the police investigation of the kidnapping of a young girl, who, in a most improbable turn of events, ends up in the custody of Junco and her sound engineer husband (Yakusho). Their plan for the dramatic return of the young girl ends in tragedy and they are haunted by her ghost as they become the focus of the police investigation.



Séance may have been produced for Japanese television but nonetheless contains the elements that have made this particular rash of goosebumps a major box office draw – eerie music, moody cinematography and creepy-crawly ghosts. Not to mention that *Séance* serves as a splendid wind-up for Kurosawa's next film, the masterful *Kairo* (2001).

Each DVD features a pristine presentation in the original aspect ratio, and contains relevant segments of an interview with Kurosawa and varying combinations of a text filmography and trailers for the three films.

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THE H.P. LOVECRAFT COLLECTION VOL. 1 – 3

Various lengths/Lurker Films

Directors from Roger Corman to Stuart Gordon to Guillermo del Toro have struggled to conjure images to match the quality of H.P. Lovecraft's dark imagination. His elusive prose, hinting at horrors lurking just beyond the veil of human perception, has proven almost impossible to translate into purely cinematic terms. It's no surprise, then, that these three DVDs, collecting shorts from Lurker Films' annual independent H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival, are a bit of a mixed bag.



Cool Air is a polished adaptation of one of Lovecraft's most melancholy tales. Director Bryan Moore manages a great deal on a limited budget, particularly the vintage hotel location (which, in the behind-the-scenes segment, he reveals he broke into when the property owner reneged at the last minute) and a compelling turn by veteran actor Jack Donner as the tragic Dr. Munoz. Though often visually striking, the 45-minute running time can't quite sustain the slight narrative, which was produced more effectively at half the length, as a segment of *Night Gallery* in 1971.

Rough Majik is not strictly an adaptation, but an expansion of the Cthulhu Mythos by way of *Prime Suspect*-style British police drama (with some *Manchurian Candidate* thrown in for good measure). Paul Darrow (Avon from *Blakes 7*) stars as Mr. Moon, a hard-edged investigator for The Night Scholars, an *X-Files*-like organization combating the imminent waking of a sleeping Elder god. The genre-bending blend works better than it probably should, and there are a number of genuinely unsettling moments throughout.





The Canadian production *Dut of Mind*, is the real standout. Both a celebration of Lovecraft's entire body of work and a creepy tale in itself, it draws from a number of stories, notably The Statement Of Randolph Carter and The Case Of Charles Dexter Ward. The fractured, feverish narrative perfectly evokes the tone and texture of Lovecraft's best fiction, and surpasses even *Dagon*'s (2001) visualization of the horrors that lurk just out of sight.

Find more details on the DVDs and the film festival that inspired them at www.lurkerfilms.com and www.hplfilmfestival.com.

Joseph O'Brien



STEPHEN KING'S GOTHAM CAFÉ

15 mins/Turtle Bay Entertainment

"Prepare for the most intense fifteen minutes of your life," promises the tagline for *Gotham Café*. Take out "the most intense" and that's what this low-budget film based on Stephen King's short story Lunch At The Gotham Café will leave you with (or without).



Protagonist Steve Davis (played by Chaney Kley of *Darkness Falls*) is signing divorce papers with his soon-to-be ex-wife (Julie Sands) and her attorney (Kevin Brief) at a tiny, unassuming restaurant called – you guessed it – Gotham Café. Their separation plans are cut short when a twitchy restaurant attendant (Cullen Douglas) decides to go on a killing rampage. The idea is, if you think you're having a bad day, chances are someone else is feeling considerably worse.

An unremarkable set-up, yes, but some creativity shines through as each character channels flashes of intense past emotions (which are intercut David Lynch-style) to deal with the situation at hand. For a story based on intense emotions, however, *Gotham Café* comes off rather sterile, largely because there isn't enough time and narrative development available to really identify with the characters.

Props go to commensurate cinematography and campy-but-good gore effects, but ultimately you might want to spend your fifteen minutes doing something else – perhaps mounting your own killing spree?

Paul Springer


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REISSUES



Jaws: The 30th Anniversary Edition: *Universal takes a double-dip.*

THE ORCA SAILS AGAIN

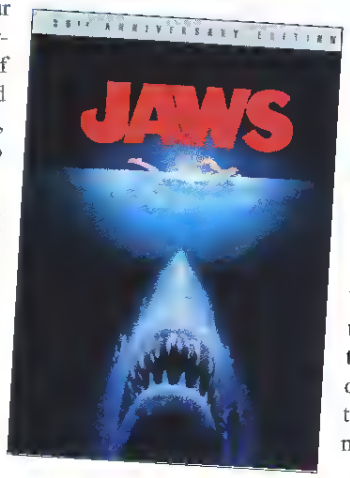
JAWS: THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (1975) DVD

Starring Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw and Richard Dreyfuss
Directed by Steven Spielberg
Written by Carl Gottlieb,
Based on the novel by Peter Benchley
Universal

It's just like clockwork isn't it, our obsession with dates and anniversaries? Thus this commemoration of days past extends to the wild and wonky world of DVD reissues, which gives studios free reign to repackage anything they can just to squeeze a little more juice out of it. Which makes this latest reissue of *Jaws* either a 30th anniversary set as the packaging indicates, or a fifth anniversary edition of the 25th anniversary edition that graced shelves in 2000 (itself a copy of the twentieth anniversary Laserdisc). But just how different are these double-dips, and does the newest one justify an upgrade?

First, let's just say that there are movies, and there are *movies*. *Jaws* is the latter, eclipsing its place as mere celluloid and becoming something else: a cultural and historical juggernaut that marked the end of one era and the beginning of the blockbuster age and the event film. In 1975 the question wasn't if you'd seen *Jaws*, it was how many times.

With that in mind, the most significant feature of this new set is the exhaustive two-hour *The Making of Jaws* documentary, which was chopped substantially in the previous release. Essentially a talking heads piece punctuated by behind-the-scenes footage, one gets the feeling that, in this case, more may be too much. Likewise the other bonus features: outtakes, deleted scenes, stills galleries (but no trailers) are from the previous releases. Although one new gem is a little-seen 1974 featurette from the set where a startlingly young Spielberg puts a brave face on what by all accounts was a hellish shoot.



In this day and age of slickly produced media press kits, it's revealing to see the barely concealed tensions present, and at the same time thrilling to witness a director unaware that he's about to change the course of film history. Of all the recently unearthed features it's the most revealing, yet hardly worth pulling out the plastic for, and doesn't come near to depicting the sheer panic revealed in Peter Biskind's chapter on *Jaws* in his book *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*.

At the end of the day, if you don't own *Jaws* on DVD, you'll want this set, but I wouldn't recommend you trade in your previous one for a few more extras. After all, with the looming Blue-Ray/HD-DVD format war, it's only a matter of time before the 35th anniversary edition comes swimming our way.

Brad Abraham

NUNS WITH BAD HABITS

SATÁNICO PANDEMONIUM (1975) DVD

Starring Cecilia Pezet, Enrique Rocha and Delia Magana
Directed by Gilberto Martínez Solares
Written by Adolfo Martínez Solares and Gilberto Martínez Solares
Mondo Macabro

In 1971 Warner Bros. gave wide release to British madman Ken Russell's controversial and certifiably bent masterpiece *The Devils*. A provocative blend of perverted sexuality, Catholicism, graphic violence and sheer Russellian weirdness, *The Devils* was also extremely popular internationally, and we all know what happens when mainstream exploitation does well internationally, don't we? Yay! Rip-offs!

Russell's anti-church opus gave birth to an entire sub-genre of sleaze, a wave of increasingly risqué pictures affectionately dubbed nunsploitation. More often than not, Russell's highbrow themes were overshadowed by his lowbrow approach and many of these pictures (most of which hailed from – where else? – Italy!) chose to simply wallow in convent lesbianism and overt blasphemy, providing cheap naughty thrills and nothing more. Gilberto Martínez Solares' exquisitely-titled 1975 Mexi-shocker *Satánico Pandemonium* (*La Sexorcisto*) was an exception, in some ways outdoing Russell's film for sheer fervent intensity.

Sister Maria (the supernaturally hot and frequently robe-free Pezet) is worshipped by her fellow nuns as an almost saintly example of goodness and decency. What they don't know is that poor Sister Maria is on the verge of a Satanic sexual meltdown and is crawling further and further into a rabbit hole of depravity. First she convinces herself that an apple-chomping wandering stud is actually El Diablo himself. From that point on it's a freefall into bloody masturbation, hot nun-on-nun sex, child molesting, rape, murder, and body desecration – indeed there are so many sick and objectionable things happening consistently in this film that even I blushed a few times! Lord above!



Extreme exploitation elements aside, the true beauty of *Satánico Pandemonium* lies in the fact that it's a masterfully – and I mean *masterfully* – shot, directed and scored film with a riveting and visceral lead performance by the fearless Pezet. I can't recall a film that erupts with such colour (credit cinematographer Jorge Sthal) and such an enthusiastically outlandish flair for sheer sick beauty. Director Solares was previously responsible for a number of El Santo monster mashes and Tin Tan comedies, but *Satánico* is without a doubt his greatest filmed achievement. A shocking, tragic and erotic work of genius and yet another reminder at how incredible '70s Mexican horror cinema was.

Chris Alexander



Satanico Pandemonium: *A new level of nun depravity.*

DUELING WITH SATAN

RACE WITH THE DEVIL (1975) DVD

Starring Peter Fonda, Warren Oates and Loretta Swit
Directed by Jack Starrett
Written by Wes Bishop and Lee Frost
Anchor Bay

Arguably, Satanism defined '70s American horror cinema. *Rosemary's Baby* kick-started the trend in '68 followed by the juggernaut success of *The Exorcist*, then *The Omen*, not to mention the myriad of rip-offs and spin-offs. Back then, El Diablo spelled dollars, no doubt. One of the countless lower-end Hollywood films to exploit this theological box office gold was Jack Starrett's tense and cheesy *Race With the Devil*, a patently ridiculous, distinctly '70s slice of satanic silliness that actually holds up pretty well.

Peter Fonda and Warren Oates star as two speed freakin' pals who opt to buy a Winebago, pack up their wives and go on a martini-fuelled Southern road trip, destination anywhere. One night the half-cut boys stumble away from camp and inadvertently witness a black mass complete with nude virgin sacrifice. They're spotted and nearly killed for their voyeurism by the cult, which proceeds, for the next 80 minutes to relentlessly pursue the unlucky lads and unfortunate ladies cross country.



Race With the Devil is a ton of fun; equal parts paranoid *Rosemary*-esque thriller (the characters and audience are constantly alerted that the cult has America-wide membership... these fuckers are *everywhere*), shrill *Texas Chainsaw* knock-off and Beelzebub-laced *Duel* clone, the film is consistently cheddar but breathlessly paced and briskly entertaining throughout. Fonda and Oates are great as the rednecks-on-the-run-do-gooders, as are the fine female leads (*Dark Shadows'* Lara Parker and *M*A*S*H**'s Loretta Swit – I never thought I'd be referencing *M*A*S*H** in the pages of *Rue Morgue*, but damn, old Hot Lips can *act*, boy!).

The real beauty of the movie is its ambiguity; the film feels like a dream and nothing about the cult is ever explained, right up to the open-ended, surreal and incomplete climax. There isn't any real gore to speak of (although dog fans be warned, a few Fidos get crucified), but there is ample violence and a fair bit of gratuitous fireside orgy action.

Anchor Bay pads the disc out with a cool new documentary, some stills, notes and a trailer, but sticks a horrible graphic on the front sleeve. Don't judge *Race With the Devil* by its cover, kids, if you've got a taste for Old Scratch trailer trash, this is the one to watch.

Chris Alexander





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BY PAUL GOBUCE

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Typically, it's independent DVD companies that are praised for loving presentations of forgotten cult classics, but MGM's Midnite Movies line has proven to be a treasure trove for genre fanatics since its debut in 2000. With pleasing transfers and affordable prices, the MM imprint showcases an impressive catalogue of low-budget horror, science fiction and straight-up exploitation flicks culled from MGM's vast library, which includes notable production outfits like United Artists, Cannon Films and American International Pictures. While Sony's recent takeover of MGM has put the future of Midnite Movies in question, the series has still unleashed dozens of weird and wonderful B-film classics in the last five years. *Rue Morgue* takes you on a whirlwind tour of some of the latest and greatest late-night staples.



The Land That Time Forgot (1975)/The People That Time Forgot (1977) DVD

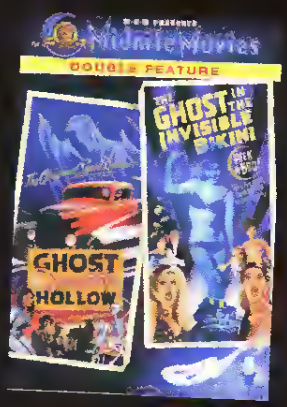
British director Kevin Connor serves up a pair of thrilling Edgar Rice Burroughs adaptations on this release. Set at the height of World War II, *The Land That Time Forgot* finds Tyler (Doug McClure) stranded on the "lost" island of Caprona with a team of British and German soldiers. While fighting off attacks from vicious dinosaurs and tribes of cavemen, the opposing armies work together to refuel their submarine and return home. Despite some ineffectual dinosaur puppets, the film is brilliantly conceived, and comes alive with truly amazing scenes of stone-age mayhem.

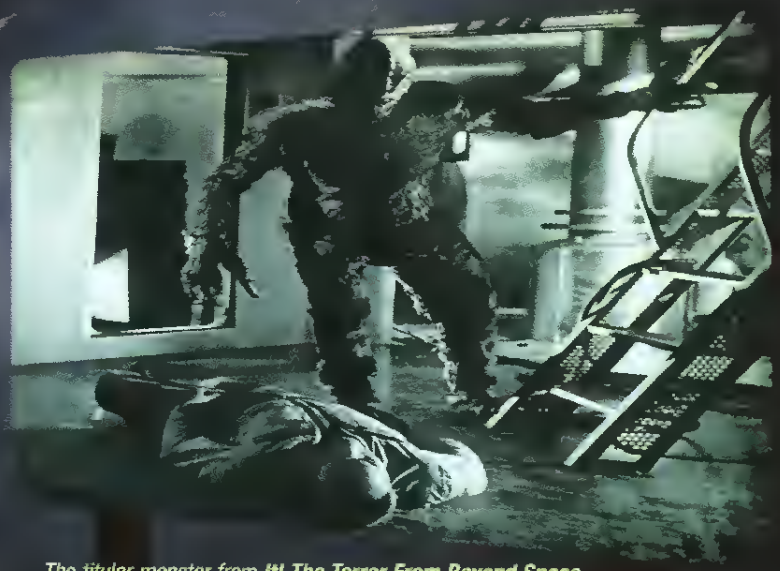
The film's sequel, *The People That Time Forgot*, has Ben McBride (Patrick Wayne), Lady Charlotte Cunningham (Sarah Douglas) and Dr. Edwin Norfolk (Thorley Walters) hot on Tyler's trail. After landing at Caprona, they rescue busty cavegirl Ajor (Dana Gillespie) from a dinosaur attack, and she leads them to the Nagas, an Iron Age civilization that has imprisoned Tyler (McClure, in a cameo) in their skull-shaped fortress. Although this film treads significantly different territory than its prehistoric predecessor, it features more action, better effects (the pterodactyls actually move their wings), and eye-catching set design.

The Ghost of Dragstrip Hollow (1959)/The Ghost In the Invisible Bikini (1966) DVD

AIP attempted to resurrect both their flagging hot rod and beach party franchises with the same haunted house spin, and the results are predictable. *The Ghost of Dragstrip Hollow* has clean-cut teens trying to convert a spooky mansion into a new drag racing clubhouse. To oust a mischievous phantom, the kids throw a rockin' Halloween shindig, and solve the mystery, *Scooby-Doo*-style. The film's emphasis may be on schlock over shock, but it floats on the spirit of innocuous 1950s teen fun, with corny jokes, hip-shaking instrumental rock and a special appearance by the star of (or more accurately, the costume from) *The She-Creature* (1956).

The Ghost In the Invisible Bikini offers a similar mix of ghostly hijinks and music, but not even a transparent bathing suit can hide the fact that the beach party craze had long run its course. Boris Karloff appears as a dead millionaire who tries to stop an unscrupulous lawyer (Basil Rathbone) from bilking Tommy Kirk and Deborah Walley out of their inheritance. With nods to several other AIP horror classics, *The Ghost In the Invisible Bikini* cranks up the camp factor to full as Karloff leaves ghostly clues to lead the teens to his hidden fortune.





The titular monster from ***It! The Terror From Beyond Space.***

Voooo Island (1957)/ The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake (1960) DVD

There's really only one reason to check out *Voodoo Island*, and that's to see Boris Karloff in a rare good guy role, as he accompanies enterprising hotel developer Howard Carlton (Dwen Cunningham) to a Pacific island amid voodoo threats by the natives. The film rallies at the end with a crop of man-eating plants, but nothing can remove the spell of tedium from this talky, sluggishly-paced offering. Karloff, wearing a goofy baseball cap, looks more than a little embarrassed about the whole ordeal.

Just as cheap, but infinitely more enjoyable, is *The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake*. After his brother's headless corpse is found, timid Jonathan (Eduard Franz) is worried that he may be the next victim of the Drake family curse. The plot mirrors a lesser sequel to *The Mummy*, as mad scientist Dr. Zurich (Henry Daniell) enlists the amputation services of undead Indian headhunter Zutai (Paul Wexler), but *The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake* is an original and excellent little shocker with several decapitations (just barely off-screen) and a detailed head-shrinking scene that is years ahead of its time.



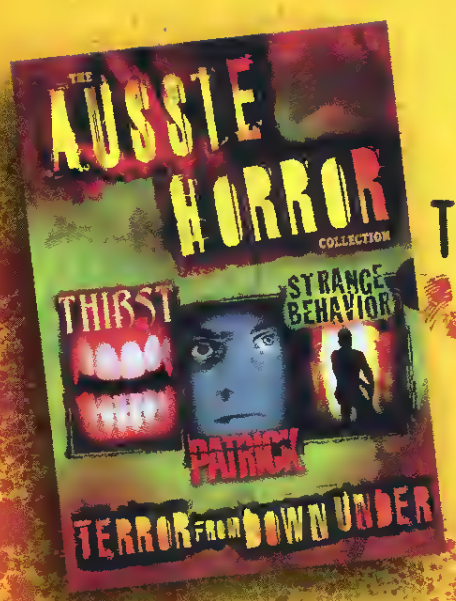
The Monster that Challenged the World (1957)/ It! The Terror From Beyond Space (1958) DVD

An unorthodox giant monster film, *The Monster That Challenged the World* has Navy Commander John Twillinger (Tim Holt) triumphing over an evil, life-sucking sea mollusk, only to be called back into action when a nest of eggs is discovered. While similar to *Them!*, this creature feature has superior, if less ambitious effects – the slug-like monster is believable, and even creepy. A strong female supporting cast helps this unpredictable, well-written B-film stand out from its peers.

Set in the fantastic year of 1973, cheap sci-fi programmer *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* isn't quite as notable. Returning from Mars, Edward Carruthers (Marshall Thompson) discovers an unwanted stowaway – a hulking Martian monster that's killing off crew members. Despite a palpable cheapness, including spaceship chairs that look suspiciously like lawn furniture, the film succeeds at creating a cramped, claustrophobic atmosphere. "It" is pretty fearsome, garnering lots of screen time as the beastie drags dead crewmen around and rips through doors like they were cardboard... which they probably were.







If you think the scariest footage to come out of Australia is the *Crocodile Hunter* outtake reel, think again because a new DVD three-pack of late-'70s and early-'80s AUSSIE HORROR titles prove that nothing goes together like fear and Foster's.

THRILLERS AND KILLERS FROM DOWN UNDER

by Chris Alexander

When we think of international horror, one country usually falls through the collective fanboy cracks: Australia. The Land Down Under, which blessed us with *Mad Max* and baby-eating dingoes, and cursed us with Paul Hogan and Yahoo Serious, is also responsible for a slew of really neat genre pics that are just as quirky as the kooky koala kuddlin' outback dwellers themselves. Elite Entertainment digs into their slimy cinematic pouch and comes up with three sort-of bloodsoaked classics in their new Aussie Horror box set.

THIRST (1979) DVD

Starring Chantal Contouri,
David Hemmings and Henry Silva
Directed by Rod Hardy
Written by John Pinkney

Certainly one of the weirdest vampire films ever lensed, *Thirst* boldly anticipates *Blade* by portraying bloodsuckers as arrogant, aristocratic, people-farming assholes. Sexy, sweet young Kate (Contouri) is kidnapped by a cult of bourgeoisie blood drinkers and whisked away to a weird island commune-cum-dairy farm. She's apparently the last living descendant of legendary blood-bather Elizabeth Bathory, and the cult (led by *Deep Red*'s Hemmings) wants to install the reluctant working-class girl as their Queen.

Kate is horrified as she tours "the farm" and witnesses legions of zombie-like human cattle wandering around dazed and drained, bred exclusively to be "milked" for their plasma. The scenes of them in their artfully-designed white cages, being bled out by huge sucking tubes, made this critic wince. Nasty stuff indeed.

Thirst is an excellent satirical horror film that puts the bite on class warfare and the callousness of the abattoir, while also functioning perfectly as a claustrophobic, scary and innovative thriller with lots of blood and *Martin*-esque artery chewing too. Extras include a fantastic commentary by veteran TV director Hardy, trailers and production notes.



PATRICK (1978) DVD

Starring Robert Thompson,
Susan Penhaligon and Robert Helpmann
Directed by Richard Franklin
Written by Everett De Roche

Thirst producer Anthony Ginane (*Screamers*) was also behind this *Carrie* clone – one of the more popular Aussie horror pics. Thompson stars as the titular life insurance-obtaining anti-villain, a comatose, mamma killin' murderer who may or may not have the power to subconsciously kill. And speaking of being unconscious, you may feel yourself being lulled into your own coma while watching this dull thud of a movie.

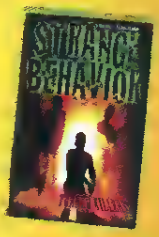


Flashy direction by future *Psycho 2* director Franklin and a surprising amount of female nudity (for a PG-rated film) won't save you from the molasses pacing, ponderous performances and utterly uninteresting subject matter. It's a total snooze, though Queen veteran Brian May's Bernard Hermann-influenced score is pretty great (side note to Italian terror fans: May's score was replaced by Goblin's for the European release). DVD extras include a dry director's commentary and some equally yawn-inducing trailers. Zzzzzzz.

STRANGE BEHAVIOR (1981) DVD

Starring Louise Fletcher,
Michael Murphy and Dan Shor
Directed by Michael Laughlin
Written by Bill Condon and Michael Laughlin

Strange Behavior, a.k.a. *Dead Kids*, is one of the scariest, weirdest slasher movies ever made and another Ginane-produced epic. Aussie-financed, shot in New Zealand and set in the US (with a mostly American cast, including Fletcher, who played Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest*), it introduces Arthur Dignam, a sick fuck MD who, for reasons known only to him, is experimenting with small-town teens and turning them into blood-crazed killers.



Gory, almost unbearably suspenseful, exceedingly well written by future Hollywood auteur Bill Condon (writer/director of *Gods and Monsters*), and boasting a moody, droning score by synth legends Tangerine Dream, *Strange Behavior* is a long-forgotten masterpiece of surreal, violent horror.

Unless you're the most jaded, cynical and unfeeling movie brute, the nightmarish ending with the kid in the bathtub will knock you on your ass. Years later Condon and Laughlin would helm the equally accomplished and offbeat sci-fi send-up *Strange Invaders*, and it's a shame that their working relationship didn't continue. *Strange Behavior* is a must-see, and proof positive that the Aussies can raise horror hackles with the best of 'em. DVD extras include a director's commentary, stills and trailers. ☠



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VINTAGE HORROR REISSUES CINEMARQUEE

VINNIE, YOU MAKE US MELT

HOUSE OF WAX (1953) DVD

Starring Vincent Price, Frank Lovejoy and Phyllis Kirk
Directed by André De Toth
Written by Charles Belden and Crane Wilbur
Warner Brothers



House Of Wax: An essential classic.



Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, waxworks became a popular and fashionable entertainment. Museums like Madame Tussaud's in London and New York's Eden Musée drew large crowds and critical admiration by offering dramatic tableaus of significant historical events, staged by meticulously-constructed wax mannequins. Beyond these reputable displays, however, thrill-seeking patrons could often find a dark staircase leading down to the Chamber of Horrors, where they could witness lifelike scenes of torture and execution alongside effigies of infamous killers – all in lurid detail.

No less of an entertaining spectacle, André De Toth's influential and landmark 1953 shocker *House of Wax* is a lush, theatrical remake of 1933's *Mystery of the Wax Museum*. While most won't bat an eyelash at the film's patently obvious plot twists, it's De Toth's unique 3-D staging that has made *House of Wax* an essential horror classic for more than five decades.

The film stars Vincent Price in his first signature role as Professor Henry Jarrod, an accomplished wax sculptor who refuses to install a Chamber of Horrors in his turn-of-the-century museum. When his greedy partner Burke (Roy Roberts) learns this, he torches down the museum to collect the insurance money, leaving the artist and his wax figures in the flaming wreckage. But before Burke can cash in on his crime, he's killed by a mysterious cloaked man and hung in an elevator shaft.

As the bodies of Burke and several other murder victims go missing, a wheelchair-bound Jarrod resurfaces to open a new museum catering to the bloodthirsty crowds, starting with a visage of his former partner's lifeless, swinging corpse. Meanwhile, museum visitor Cathy (Carolyn Jones) is struck by a wax Joan of Arc's uncanny resemblance to her slain roommate, and becomes suspicious of Jarrod's sculpting techniques.

Until *House of Wax*, 3-D films had largely been B-list affairs, but De Toth – who ironically only had one eye and was unable to see the multi-dimensional fruits of his labour – changed the way that studios looked at the new technology with this classy, well-made hit. Using the optical effects to enhance the atmosphere of his film, rather than to drive the plot, De Toth highlights the depth of his images, creating an ominous and densely-layered Technicolor setting.

The museum becomes as gothic as any old mansion, populated by frozen figures that lend a touch of the macabre to each scene, especially as Burke's fire grotesquely melts away their wax faces early on. There are a few gratuitous 3-D effects, including swinging skeletal arms, cadavers bolting upright, and a paddleball pitchman, but the true set pieces of the film are the scenes of the killer stealing bodies from the morgue and stalking Sue through the lamplit streets, melodramatic wax dioramas come to life.

Outside of the film's atmospheric style and groundbreaking use of 3-D, *House of Wax* also catapulted Vincent Price toward his deservedly celebrated status as a horror icon. As Jarrod evolves from empathetic to captivatingly evil over the course of the film, Price deftly balances moments of pure menace with tongue-in-cheek scenery chewing. It's one of his finest performances, in a role that perfectly matches the carnivalesque tone of the film.

Like the most lurid scene of torture in a Chamber of Horrors, *House of Wax* may be stagy and occasionally over-the-top, but you can't help admiring the artistry with which it was put together. Amazingly, De Toth's film works almost as well in two dimensions as it does in three, which makes this Warner Brothers DVD, recently re-released to tie into the (in-name-only) theatrical remake, a welcome addition to every classic horror DVD library.

Paul Corupe



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THE MAD MUSINGS OF A SCHIZOID CINEPHILE



by Chris Alexander



Tobe Hooper's Lifeforce

Don't tell me that Tobe Hooper made only one massive classic in his spotty 30-year stint behind the lens. *Texas Chainsaw*, Shmexas Shmainsaw, I say. In fact, this month's column is devoted to one of the most undervalued epics of the 1980s. It came out the same year as *Re-Animator*, *Return of the Living Dead* and *Day of the Dead*, and I think it's better than all three of those admittedly awesome pics combined. And yes, I believe it's superior in almost every way to *Chainsaw*. Ladies and gents, I give you Tobe Hooper at the peak of his creative powers: 1985's *Lifeforce*.

Immediately after Hooper's massively successful, Spielberg-produced (and possibly co-directed) *Poltergeist*, offers were flying fast and furious from all directions. Eventually the cigar chompin' Texan linked up with Golan/Globus (a.k.a. Cannon Pictures) – the sorry lads behind scores of ninja numbers and Chuck Norris nightmares – and secured an admittedly impressive (though box office poison) three-picture deal. This included a sequel to *Chainsaw* (which, as a side note, I absolutely adore), a remake of the '50s commie creeper *Invaders From Mars* and a big-budget adaptation of the 1976 Colin Wilson novel *Space Vampires*.

Cannon hired *Alien* vet Dan O'Bannon to pen the screenplay, they retitled it *Lifeforce*, shot it mostly in England and cast an impressive array of classically trained British thesps (including *Star Trek*'s Patrick Stewart in a weird role I'm sure he'd like to forget). The result sharply divided fans and critics alike, with some placing it as one of the year's best, and others declaring it the stinker of the century. You know where I stand.

The reasons some love *Lifeforce*, are the same reasons others loathe it: the film is absolutely, inarguably insane. Structurally, it makes *Texas Chainsaw* look positively restrained and, admittedly, the movie has no conception of what it wants to be. It just is. But what is it? In a nutshell: fucking brilliant.

The plot: the space shuttle Churchill crosses paths with a derelict vessel that resembles a giant bat. Inside it, the crew discovers a trio of hot nude aliens encased in transparent glass coffins. The aliens turn out to be energy-sucking vampires, and their leader (the impossibly stunning Mathilda May) proceeds to drain the crew dry, save for one lovesick sap: Colonel Tom Carlson (*Helter Skelter*'s Steve Railsback). Then the sexy bloodsuckers make their way to earth to turn humans into blood-drinking zombies. At the centre of it all, terminally confused cop Peter Firth and the now psychically damaged Carlson race around London trying to find the Vampiress to send her back to Hell, er… space.

Lifeforce begins as an *Alien* clone, turns into a vampire movie, and then slips into a sort-of riff on Hammer's *Quatermass* series, before morphing into a living dead drama, then a plague picture, and eventually positioning itself as an end of the world saga! All the while, the film refuses to acknowledge the hysterical silliness of its constantly altering situations, choosing to play it absolutely straight, which I love.

John (*Star Wars*) Dykstra's visual effects are phenomenal, Nick Maley's zombie puppets are terrifying, the performances range from fantastic (*The Pianist*'s Frank Finley) to frenetic (Railsback) to unforgettable (May is femininity personified), and the schizo screenplay is a ton of fun. While the film has plenty of flaws, it's way ahead of its time.

Hardcore *Lifeforce* fans are aware of two radically different versions of the movie in circulation: the Cannon/Hooper original 116-minute cut featuring a rollicking (though kinda inappropriate) score by Henry Mancini, and the 102-minute version, recut by TriStar for the US release. The TriStar version was the one distributed on VHS by Vestron in the '80s and it eliminates John Larroquette's dumb voice-over, clips some laughable dialogue (including a groaning exchange between Firth and a male vamp at the climax), throws in more zombie action and replaces much of Mancini's music with a really creepy Michael Kamen synth score. The MGM DVD version is the original edit, but I prefer the tighter, creepier TriStar version, and I hope that someone releases it one day soon.

Alexander, wide-eyed, completely nude, and affectionately, out.

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HORROR



BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

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IN THIS ISSUE!

The Surrogates #1 (of 5)
by Robert Venditti & Brett Weldele *Top Shelf*

Hellboy: The Island #1 (of 2)
by Mike Mignola *Dark Horse*

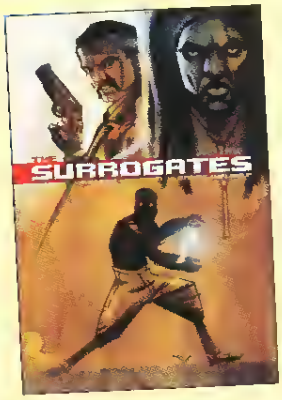
Friday the 13th Special
by Brian Pulido and Mike Wolfer *Avatar*

Mosquito
by Dan James *Top Shelf*

Elsinore #1
by Kenneth Lillie-Paetz and Brian Denham *Alias*

The Faceless: A Terry Sharp Story
by Bob Tinnell and Adrian Salmon *Image*

If you like your future dirty, dystopian and downright technophobic, then have I got a comic for you. *The Surrogates* posits our society having developed, by the year 2054, the means of wearing bodies as if they were clothes. Whether this constitutes evolution or literal dehumanization is another matter entirely. The titular characters are the disposable (albeit expensive) bodies in question, and while horror rears its ugly head in manners graphic and philosophical here – after all, murder is an event involving both – *The Surrogates* is really dark sci-fi disguised as a police procedural.



Unfortunately, it's impossible to discuss the book's story even tangentially without giving away details crucial to the preservation of suspense. Simply explaining the purpose of the surrogates has already destroyed the careful build-and-reveal of the launch issue's riveting first dozen pages. But that said, trust me on this: you haven't seen world-weary cops until you've seen world-weary cops whose run-ragged bodies aren't even their own in the first place. Specifics aside, the craftsmanship speaks for itself. Plot, pacing and characterization throughout this launch issue are note-perfect. Not bad for a first-time writer.

And in keeping with a trend that seems to be spreading through the world of indie publishing these days, each issue includes a fistful of supplemental pages offering optional but superb secondary insight to the story. Issue #1 features a fascinating essay on the advent of the surrogates (not surprisingly, for medical purposes) and the complex ethical ramifications of allowing them to be used for quotidian needs. In addition, the back cover sports a faux ad that lends chilling authenticity to the already-too-credible scenario.

On the art front, relative newcomer Brett Weldele makes a strong impression with a style easiest described as Ben Templesmith (30 Days of Night) with more detail. The scratchy, Photoshopped look favoured by the aforementioned artist as well as mentor Bill Sienkiewicz is omnipresent, but the faces are much more clearly defined than is typical in this type of environment-over-character method – a change for the better.

Certainly, the closest cinematic cousin of *The Surrogates* is *Blade Runner*, but you'll find common threads with pictures like *A.I.* and *Brazil* here as well, even the *Terminator* series. (*Alien* and *Outland*, too, in terms of the seedy, anything-but-clean environment – make no mistake: no matter what your beliefs, the walls of the future won't be hospital white.) I wouldn't be pushing the filmic correlation so strongly if I wasn't wholly convinced that this book is bound for the silver screen, and soon – I wouldn't even be surprised if it had already been optioned on the strength of the first issue alone, as was *30 Days of Night* (*RM#34*).

"Everyone dreams of changing the world – I only want to change it back," laments a key character as the first issue of *The Surrogates* draws to a close. A fitting way of paraphrasing the genie-out-of-the-bottle concept driving this cautionary tale of humanity inadvertently initiating its own obsolescence. Unless, of course, the police can solve the larger mystery, because in a world where bodies are just walking pieces of technology, dead men do tell tales.



The Surrogates: *A cautionary tale in the vein of* Blade Runner *and* Terminator.

QUICK CUTS

Mike Mignola's previous *Hellboy* (*RM#38*) story, *The Third Wish*, saw the distraught hellspawn-cum-hero turning his back on the world to walk the bottom of the sea and collect his thoughts. *The Island* is a direct sequel, arguably a "real time" sequel too, given that it opens with Hellboy having spent exactly two years plumbing both the deep blue depths and his deep red forehead; exactly the amount of time that passed between issues.



Mignola's fans will find a new level of minimalism in the artist's distinctive chiaroscuro style, as well as an all-time record for using light colours rather than darks to define negative space. Additionally, this is one of the most forthcoming stories in the canon in terms of explaining Hellboy's destiny. It's astounding, really, that Mignola would wait for one of the shorter stories to start dishing, but Mike's never been short on do-it-my-way attitude. Good thing he has the storytelling skill to back that up.

If you go into the woods of Camp Crystal Lake today, you won't be in for much of a surprise. Of course, in terms of the *Friday the 13th* horror brand, more of the same isn't exactly a bad thing. The lead title in Avatar's triple-threat licensing deal to develop new stories with Jason Voorhees, Freddy Krueger and Leatherface, this comic is about as competent as any of the bastard Voorhees children (sorry, sequels), and like said progeny, it's more functional than it is "Special".



Astonishingly, there's an above-average amount of plot, with the owners of the camp deploying mercenaries to rid the area of Jason once and for all so that they can develop the lakeside real estate. But at the end of the day, action speaks louder than dialogue, and the body count hits a respectable eleven (over 22 pages) – death-by-helicopter-propeller being the obvious highlight. Given the preferred style of execution on display though, perhaps Jason should consider changing his surname to Cleaver?

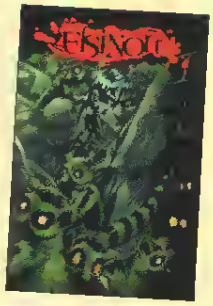
Writer/artist Dan James doesn't just favour iconography, he clearly likes icons as well. *Mosquito* is an omni-lingual (as in, silent) interpretation of the vampire mythos, rendered in a distinctive woodcut-evocative style that creates a sense of true surrealism. The mini-monster of the title acts as an ideal and original metaphor for the bloodsucking legend. After all, as Van Helsing himself points out in Bram Stoker's classic novel, the vampire does not die like the bee after stinging only once (even the comic's cover symbolizes the leeching insect as a syringe slowly filling itself).



Technically a story within a story, the brief framing tale introduces an artist who creates the very book you're reading. *Mosquito* follows a stoic father turned reluctant hero, entrusted seemingly at random by an unmarked envelope containing all the information he needs to find and destroy the nosferatu preying on the children of his town. For an added dash of inspired style, this two-colour tale is presented in (blood) red and white.

Maybe I've flown over the cuckoo's nest once too often of late, but the lead issue of the asylum horror *Elsinore* left me confused, frustrated and more than a little "mad." As I say, I've put in more than my fair time with nutcases, including the better part of a day processing every supplement and footnote in the fifteenth anniversary edition of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.

Anyhow, *Elsinore* involves a centuries-old prophecy and a modern-day inmate of the titular madhouse who's not as crazy as he seems, given that his imaginary friends, lemurs, have become somehow corporeal. There's no shortage of heavy-banded foreboding dialogue here, and juggling narrative timelines along with different diary excerpts proves overly ambitious. But time off for good behaviour: artist Brian Denham delivers terrific atmosphere throughout, and even manages to make a secret order of doctors who dress like birds look threatening rather than stupid.



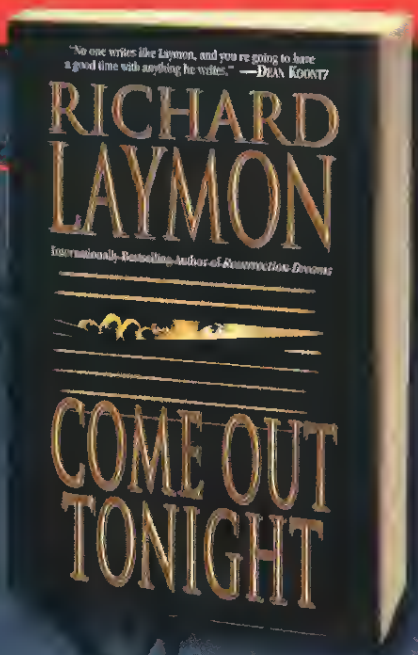
A story perfectly described by its writer as a cross between *The Saint* and *Curse of the Demon*, *The Faceless* involves a horror film director by day who fights for rights (and even fights rites) at night. Terry Sharp is one of those classic, two-fisted, know-it-all kinds of pulp action heroes that emerged during the cold war (when this story is set), and the Byronic exaggeration of his no-nonsense, self-absorbed character is oftentimes hilarious (albeit unintentionally, I think).



Artist Adrian Salmon brings a wholly appropriate Bruce Timm feel to the proceedings – heck, Sharp even looks like a moustachioed Bruce Wayne from *Batman: The Animated Series* – and his background colour palette is exceptional. The pace of this tale of witchcraft and political conspiracy is relentless, a true page-turner, and though the main plot achieves resolution, it's clear that we've not heard the last of this monster hunter, those occultists or that pugnacious Emma Peel-type who would sooner slap our hero upside the head than kiss him on his ultra-square jaw. Good scream fun. Check out the flashy trailer at terrysharp.net

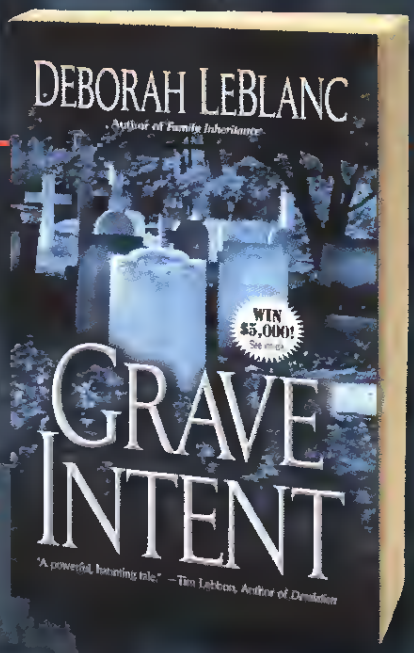


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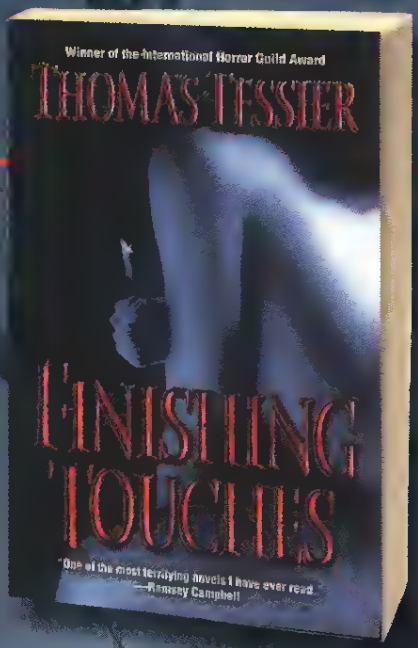
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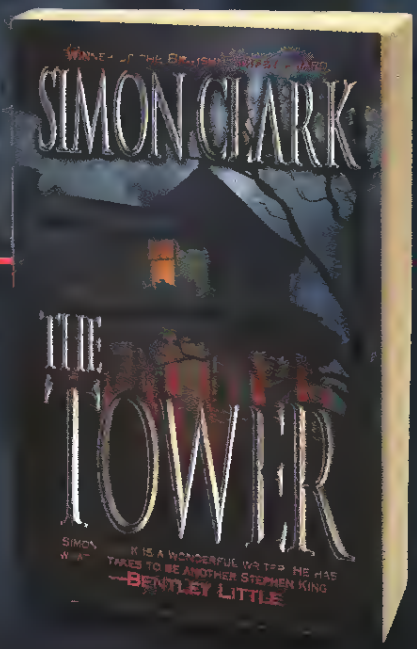
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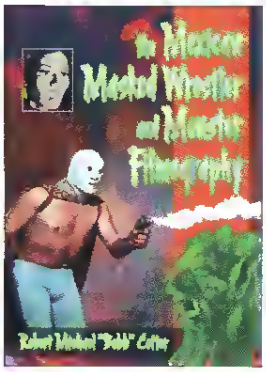
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Beating the Devil: The Making of Night of the Demon

Tony Earnshaw
Tomahawk Press

To see or not to see. That's the question raised by 1957's *Night/Curse of the Demon*. The highly regarded British-made horror flick has been the subject of much debate over the years. The central conundrum was a great movie made merely good by showing the demon in question?

Historically, director Jacques Tourneur (*The Cat People*, *I Walked With a Zombie*) has been cast as the martyr whose work was ruined when producer Hal E. Chester inserted clumsy effects sequences showing the fire demon only alluded to in Tourneur's subtler vision of the film – Chester's thinking being that audiences paid to see a monster so he would give it to them. In fact, this writer toed that same line in a previous column (see Classic Cut, *RM#6*).

But what if Tourneur not only knew about Chester's intentions, but tacitly approved of them? This is author Tony Earnshaw's contention in *Beating The Devil: The Making of Night of the Demon*, a companion to a flawed but masterful horror classic. Earnshaw details the film's entire history, from its origins as a story by M.R. James (*Casting the Runes*) through to the script's many examinations by the British censors (their many concerns included the number and duration of screams, and dialogue related to devil worship), its sometimes troubled production (American star Dana Andrews was often drunk) and, of course, the manufacturing of the demon.

But *Beating the Devil*'s real raison d'être is an examination of the degree of complicity between Tourneur and Chester (described by one crew member as "a pain in the arse") when it came to showing the monster. Earnshaw quotes studio correspondence and participants in the production to prove that Chester insisted upon showing audiences the fire demon from the beginning – and Tourneur knew it.

The author tends to side with Tourneur's objections, declaring that "a magnificent moment of suggestion... is completely ruined by the gratuitous insertion of the demon's face" but also acknowledging that this "potentially hamfisted, destructive move also works extraordinarily positively in the film's favour."

Earnshaw's prose is easy to read, and he details the film's legacy in exhaustive (some might say exhausting) detail. Horror fans in general and admirers of *Night of the Demon* in particular will be pleased.

Sean Plummer

The Mexican Masked Wrestler and Monster Filmography

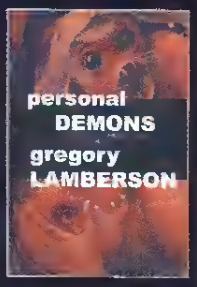
Robert Michael "Bobb" Cotter
McFarland & Co.

Ai yai yai! There's just something about barrel-chested Mexican men in silver masks throwing each other around a padded mattress that does it for me, especially if vampire women, werewolves and mummies get tossed into the ring too. Obviously I'm not alone, or else Bobb Cotter's new ode to Santo and company, *The Mexican Masked Wrestler and Monster Filmography* wouldn't exist. But thank Cristo it does.

Exploring the weird history of the south of the border "lucha libre" phenomenon, specifically its impact on the Mexican motion picture industry, *TMMWMF* is a delightful read and, without a doubt, the last word on its subject. Said weird history is colourful, it's fascinating to see how masked wrestling stars were the equivalent of our comic book idols. Instead of Superman, burrito-fed boys would swoon over the ass-kicking exploits of El Santo, a legendary real-life ring tosser who figures prominently into Cotter's tome, as do his contemporaries Blue Demon and Mil Mascaras. In the movies, these silly, paunchy, simplistically "good", vampire killin', werewolf skinnin' gladiators represented truth, justice and the Mexican way.

The Grim Reader

PERSONAL DEMONS
Gregory Lamberson
Broken Umbrella Press



A serial killer called the Cipher is running around slashing throats and it's up to a rather typical NYPD homicide detective to figure out the ordeal while working for a reclusive billionaire. Sounds like a *Red Dragon* rip-off, but Lamberson's ability to twist a scenario and offer up descriptive, shiver-inducing murders makes *Personal Demons* a unique noir that quickly becomes a gripping must-finish.

Keith Carman

THE CREEPS
D.W. Frydendall
Burnside Publications



Artist D.W. Frydendall compiles ten years of black and white, traditional woodcut-style horror illustrations in *The Creeps*. His art, which has appeared in comics, print, clothing and glassware, is divided into chapters pertaining to ghosts, vampires, werewolves, evil sorcerers and their ilk. An introduction by Gris Grimly affirms my suspicion that Frydendall is an artist to keep an eye on.

Jovanka Vuckovic

THE SILENCE BETWEEN THE SCREAMS
Lucy Taylor
Overlook Connection Press



A predictable collection of short stories that range from first-person schlock about friends killing an abusive husband that wouldn't even have made the cut for *Creepshow 2*, to moderately amusing suspense involving a disappearing town. Unfortunately, the compilation has a hard time finding its way to interesting, let alone horrific.

Keith Carman



Santo takes on the Mummy from Guanajuato

The complete cowled crusader catalogue is represented here, analyzed and examined not just for its entertainment value but as a reflection of the culture. Cotter realizes his subject matter is ludicrous but kudos to him for taking it relatively seriously and researching the topic so well. He surely realizes these films not only have a cult following but legions of admirers who know them inside and out.

Even more eye-opening than the terrific text is the body slammin' selection of black and white stills and lobby cards. The long-lost more explicit versions of these monster mashes, dubbed "sexos", are reflected in these lurid stills. If you're even a casual fan of this wacky, wonderful sub-genre of sombrero horror, this book is indispensable.

Chris Alexander

tales
H.P. Lovecraft
Library of America

The evolution of H.P. Lovecraft as not only a great horror writer, but a great writer of American short stories and poetry began last year with the Library of America's *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century, Volume One*, which contained two of Lovecraft's *Fungi from Yuggoth* sonnets. This inclusion with such poets as Robert Lowell and Dorothy Parker signaled that Lovecraft had broken out of the academically less-respected genre of horror literature and was beginning to get some credit for being a major American author. His stature as such just took another giant leap forward with the publication of the esteemed Library of America edition of Lovecraft's work entitled *Tales*.

The mad scribe's writings have been majorly influential on a number of writers and filmmakers, most notably Stuart Gordon, Stephen King, Clive Barker, and Peter Straub (who edited this Library of America volume). Ironically enough, when reading this particular collection of weird tales, it's evident that Lovecraft's prose was much more urbane and delicate than even King's, or any other contemporary master of macabre fiction. This is perhaps best illustrated in the writer's infamous short The Statement Of Randolph Carter, which contains passages like "...shadows seemed to lurk in the darker recesses of the weed choked hollow and to flit as in some blasphemous ceremonial procession past the portals of the mouldering tombs in the hills" – hardly the sledgehammer purple prose associated with horror lit.

Another revelation after reading the 22 stories collected here is that Lovecraft's work has echoes of refined Northeastern stylists

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In a time when many mainstream horror novels still heavily rely on the age-old battle between good and evil, author TIM LEBBON chooses to excavate the gray regions.

Between Good & Evil

by Monica S. Kuebler

Ten years after the death of his only son, Tom's suspicions about a military cover-up suddenly seem anything but farfetched. He starts lying to his wife, digging up unmarked mass graves, dodging bullets and barreling across the UK in a stolen car with the chain-wrapped corpse of a mysterious child who's been buried for a decade – but not "dead."

Like Tom (from the new novel *Berserk*, pictured above), the characters that inhabit the pages of author Tim Lebbon's stories seek truth, and in that search they blur the lines between good and evil, creating grayscale landscapes where the reader may side with the monsters and the true monster may in fact be human.

"Sometimes a monster is only perceived as such by certain people, and the best monsters – or bad guys – in novels are those that have a good side as well," Lebbon tells *Rue Morgue*. "Someone who is totally irredeemably bad often doesn't make for such an interesting character. Many monsters/bad guys in real life believe that what they're doing isn't necessarily wrong, so it's interesting to translate this into fiction."

The Bram Stoker award-winning author cites Cole, the "supposed bad guy" in *Berserk*, as a perfect example. Cole is a cold-blooded killer who believes wholeheartedly that what he is doing is right. And his internal conflict only aids in making him that much more believable.

"I'm fascinated with what makes us tick, and what sometimes makes us tick the wrong way," Lebbon notes. "I like to explore the potential in humanity for good and bad. I believe that humankind has become very arrogant in its presumption that it now controls its own destiny, and I see great dangers in becoming complacent about our own future."

The author, who resides in Wales with his family, grew up on a steady diet of *Dr. Who*, *Children of the Stones* and *Roald Dahl's Tales of the Unexpected*. Not surprisingly, Lebbon infuses a similar blend of mystery and character-driven tension into his work, often by deliberately choosing to leave his readers almost as much in the dark as the characters themselves are. His finely-crafted narratives draw out the suspense to palpable proportions before allowing the release of the final reveal. And just as restrained, is his use of grue.

"Splatter and gore has its place, but if that's all there is to a story, it's not a horror story, it's a shock story," he says. "The horror's in the psychological effects a disemboweling has on its subject or perpetrator, not the processes of the disemboweling itself. Real horror books affect you on an emotional level and leave you dwelling on what you've just seen or read."

Instead, Lebbon creates unease by rooting his literary terrors close to home, in particular, average people and families that find themselves altered, destroyed or faced with unimaginably extreme situations.

"When my eldest child Ellie was born almost seven years ago, I wrote the novel *Face* about a family fracturing under threat from the outside," Lebbon says. "The father-figure Dan felt like a failure, unable to protect his wife when she was attacked several years earlier, and later unable to protect her or his daughter or even himself when they're confronted by this terrible character. It's all my fears rolled into one."



Berserk is now available from Necessary Evil Press in limited edition hardcover format, while Leisure Books has picked it up for a mass-market release in early 2006. With several of Lebbon's titles optioned for film including *Face*, *White*, *Exorcising Angels* (co-written with Simon Clark), *Until She Sleeps* and *Fodder* (a novelette co-written with Brian Keene), it seems the author, who already has a more enthusiastic following in North America than in Britain, is destined to become a household name.

More info: www.timlebbon.net.

Illustration by Carnglia



city of the dead
Brian Keene
Leisure Books

terminal
Brian Keene
Bantam Spectra

If there are two simple things that can be said about horror author Brian Keene (*RM#39*) it's that he writes balls-out, bloodsoaked fiction and imbues his works with characters you actually give a shit about. This summer he returns with two new novels, *City of the Dead*, the much-anticipated follow-up to *The Rising* (*RM#37*), and *Terminal*, a zombie-free exercise in how far desperation can drive a person.



City of the Dead is the sequel to a book that was never intended to have one. It picks up where *The Rising* left shell-shocked readers dangling. Amidst a zombie apocalypse, Jim and company arrive at his ex-wife's home in hopes of rescuing his young son but there is little time for sentimental reunions. From there the plot careens forward at a breakneck pace, setting the tone for the rest of the book. The group flees, literally cutting a swath through the undead masses before they are rescued and delivered to the last place of human refuge: a NYC skyscraper designed to withstand any terrorist attack.

But the zombies (SPOILER: intelligent demons who possess the bodies of the recently deceased) are resourceful and use military weaponry to launch an offensive against the survivors. *City*, while not as tensely heart-rending as *The Rising*, cranks the action up to eleven and Keene deserves serious props for ending the novel as he does.



In *Terminal*, the zombies are replaced by the monsters of disease, poverty, desperation and man himself. Tommy is a loving father and husband who's having the world's worst week; he's behind on the bills, he's been diagnosed with terminal cancer and has just gotten laid off. With less than a month to live and no hope of providing for his family, he decides to rob a bank.

Everything goes bad quick; people die, cops surround the place, and just when it couldn't get any worse – it does. *Terminal* is a dark, intense page-turner, a train wreck of human suffering and constantly multiplying mistakes. It's much more refined than *The Rising* or *City of the Dead* and in many ways *Terminal* is Keene's most developed and mature novel to date, proving that he's has no intention of being typecast as that guy who wrote that "zombie" book.

Monica S. Kuebler

such as Edith Wharton and Washington Irving (*Sleepy Hollow*). His material incorporating New York scenarios, such as The Horror At Red Hook and He, helps exploit the weird energy the isle of Manhattan emanates, while also tying this energy to the history and customs of old New York (much like the work of Wharton and Irving).

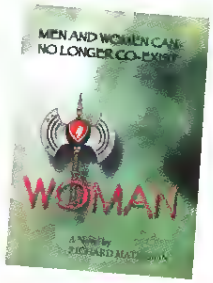
The quality of stories collected in *Tales* varies wildly, and even the hardcore Lovecraft devotee might find it hard to justify its 850 pages. Nonetheless, the volume might remind a generation of readers that there's greatness within the pulp genre when the tales are sufficiently imaginative and the author is committed to his own mythic vision.

Mark Rhodes

woman
Richard Matheson
Gauntlet Press

Even if veteran horror scribe Richard Matheson (*I Am Legend*, *Legend of Hell House*) wrote *Darkness Falls The Musical* I couldn't dredge up any bile to spit on him. Matheson's power and importance as a writer is exceeded only by his uncanny ability to etch finely drawn everyday characters and let them simply adjust to whatever horror evolves around them. It's a lot harder than it sounds, and nobody does it quite like Tricky Dick. Still churning out quality work at almost 80 years of age, it's arguable that Matheson's writing just gets better and better. He's one of the few truly intellectual genre writers with genuine concern for the world around him... and beyond.

Matheson's new novella, the unimaginatively titled *Woman*, is a classic late-period Matheson thriller/cautionary tale that paralyzes. The story begins as a chamber piece, with a pre-Emmy Awards show being crashed by a mysterious, neurotic, possibly telepathic young woman, and continues as a weird battle of the sexes erupts around her with frenetic, possibly supernatural results. From there the author shifts gears and drives the tale home as the novel turns into a dark, abstract, surreal (and admittedly occasionally silly) *Twilight Zone*-ish nightmare. *Woman* is Matheson at his most philosophical and metaphysical, and is a thought-provoking examination of sexual politics set against a darkly humorous horror backdrop.

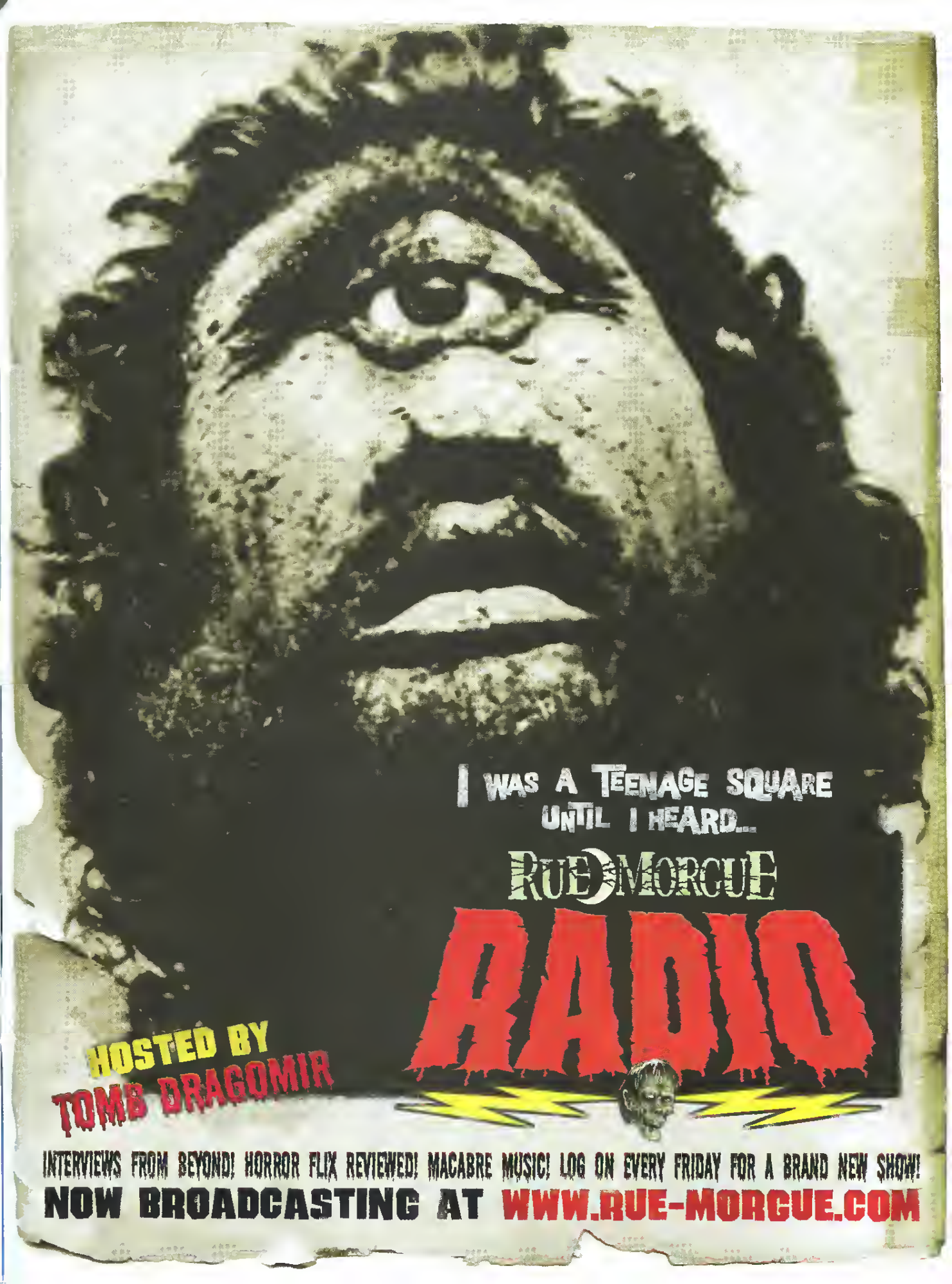


With *Woman*, Matheson suggests that the feminist movement is a lost cause, that man has plowed the planet into violent submission, annihilating the natural world and any hope that femininity has of surviving. His antagonist, Ganine, is also his protagonist; she is literally a force of nature that has evolved from centuries of stress and has a plan to set things right. Anne Rice covered this theme far more pretentiously with her mammoth *Vampire Chronicles* novel *Queen of the Damned*, Matheson's approach is less frilly, more direct and immediate. *Woman* is an excellent, fast read by an author who continues to challenge, engage and push the boundaries of horror fiction.

Chris Alexander






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EDGAR ALLAN POE MUSEUM
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

by Justin Humphreys

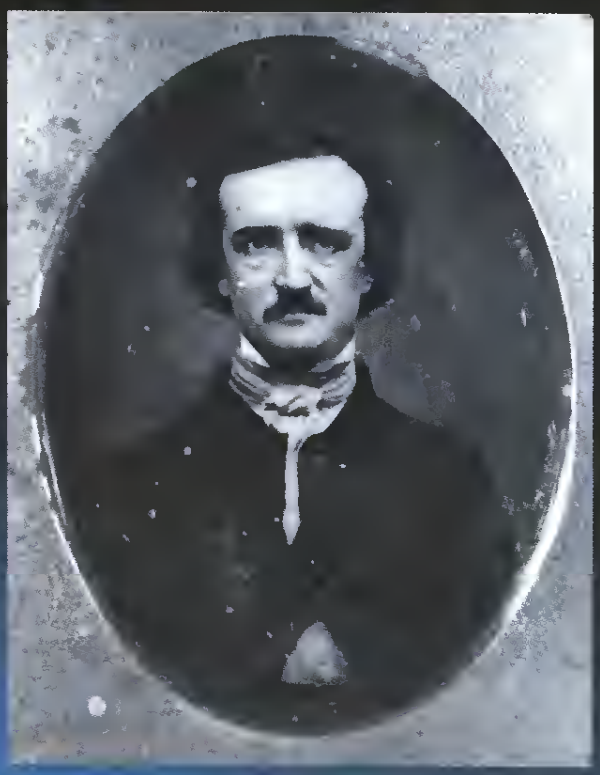


Edgar Allan Poe may lie buried in Baltimore, Maryland, but in life he considered Richmond, Virginia his hometown. He spent a third of his life in Richmond and penned his only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, there among many other works. In a 1904 article in *The Century* (Landmarks Of Poe In Richmond), Charles Graves went so far as to write that the author "loved Richmond as he loved no other place on Earth."

Even if Graves was exaggerating, it makes no difference. The Grand Master's traces still linger all over Virginia's state capitol (in spite of the fact that none of Poe's homes there still stand). Mere blocks away from the sites of the author's first Richmond home and his first workplace – a newspaper called the *Southern Literary Messenger* – stands the Poe Museum, located at 1914-1916 East Main Street in the Shockoe Bottom area.

Founded in 1921, the Museum encompasses Richmond's oldest building, The Old Stone House and the two buildings adjacent to it. From Main Street, they look deceptively unassuming. But inside the Museum bombards its visitors with all things Poe.

A warning to tourists seeking prurient interest: look elsewhere. There are no expansive galleries of Poe, no jars holding laudanum (an opium tincture that the writer nearly overdosed on), and no accounts of clandestine visits to Richmond's very first S&M club. What you will find is a treasure of artifacts on a tour that visually recreates the life, works, and death of one of the genre's most revered writers.



Just beyond the Museum's entrance is the obligatory gift shop. Like the rest of the Museum it is compact, but well-stocked. Its merchandise ranges from the obvious (manuscript facsimiles and posters) to the arcane (Christmas ornaments and dog tags). "Poestcards", "Poe'sters", and other Poe puns abound. The inevitable flock of stuffed ravens surveys the room, joined by the Mystery Writers of America's Raven Award trophy (awarded to the museum in 2003 for 81 years of promoting Poe). Considering that Poe died of the drink, the commemorative shot glasses and wine stoppers sit with eerie irony in a central display case.

The gift shop takes you directly into the Old Stone House, dedicated both to the writer and local history (the Poe Foundation rescued this landmark from ruin). Furniture from the *Southern Literary Messenger* – which Poe edited – and from his various local homes lines the room. Paintings hang above, including tiny portraits of his guardians, the Allans.

From the main building, visitors enter the centre's hub, the gorgeous Poe Garden and Shrine. The Museum is full of elements that contrast as starkly as Poe's gothic tales do against his love poems, and this idyllic garden is diametrically opposed to the sombre life story lurking inside. At the far end, the vaulted Shrine rests, constructed partly from the *Messenger* building's remnants. The focal point of all of this, a plaster cast of Edmund Quinn's bust of Poe pensively looks on.

Visitors are then shown into one of the tour's blander portions, a room devoted to the author's life in the capital. Mementos flank a gigantic, raked scale model of historic Richmond. One standout piece is Poe's chair from the *Messenger* offices; in terms of apparent discomfort, this dreary tin monstrosity makes the rack look like an E-Z Boy recliner.

Next is a room lined with rows of austere white display cases. Inside them are his copies of his letters, manuscripts, and rare copies of his books, including a first edition of his immortal *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

Again, there are vast contrasts. Looming over everything is Richard Park's 1885 marble Monument, set in relief with a bronze bust of the woebegone master of macabre. While in a case beside the Monument is possibly the Museum's crown jewel: one of the five known Ultima Thule daguerreotypes of the dissipated Poe, what the author considered to be "his best likeness" and one of the best-known literary portraits of the 19th century. For anyone steeped in Poe's work

and life, the Museum holds a kind of peculiarly religious significance.

Nearby is an unforgettably poignant memento: a postcard-sized watercolour that the author once owned, titled "The Fatal Letter". It depicts a woman, her face buried deep in her handkerchief, weeping furiously.

With that melancholic image fresh in your mind, you move on to the bleak-looking Carnage House – a room devoted to Poe's death. The morbidly curious will be delighted by the lock of the Master's hair (taken at his deathbed), a key found in his pocket when he died, and other memento mori on display.

Moving upstairs, passing a display built around Poe's boyhood bed, you are left unprepared for what follows. After the display cases' antiseptic whiteness, and the muted darkness of the "Death Room", the Raven Room is a nuclear fireball of red.

It houses a vast, rotating collection of illustrations of the author's writings. Its centrepiece is also a copy of the Quinn bust, albeit a superior one. Beside it there is another vivid juxtaposition – a surreal portrait, circa 1959, hangs next to Frederick Bookman's dead-on, antique, charcoal likeness of the author. Rows of alternately macabre and manic illustrations – like Edmund Dulac's interpretation of Poe's poem The Bells – leap out at you, vastly unlike the staid portraits found earlier in the tour. This room is more alive.

Some of the art displayed here will be familiar to Poe enthusiasts: reproductions of Aubrey Beardsley and Dulac's evocative illustrations, for instance. But there are also revelations waiting on these walls. Featured piece include Elihu Vedder's graceful cover art to Gustave Dore's take on *The Raven*, or artist Robert Lawson's effusively detailed rendering of the opening of *The Fall of the House of Usher*, which calls to mind illustrator Arthur Rackham's astonishing work.

Throughout the tour, hardcore genre lovers may find themselves endlessly cross-referencing the exhibits with their own memories of the master's works and their endless incarnations. Standing within touching distance of the two candlesticks which light Poe wrote *The Bells* by, may immediately bring to mind Basil Rathbone's recording of that poem.





The Edgar Allan Poe Museum: *a plaster cast of Edmund Quinn's Poe bust (above), and a room housing examples of the author's written work (below).*

POE MUSEUM & GIFT SHOP

The museum's storehouse of the macabre hosts enough Poe for twenty museums, (they even have a pair of his socks). Whatever the level of interest, aficionados will find the experience enlightening. Vincent Price did; ever the consummate gentleman, he gave a public reading during his visit.

Most satisfying of all, though, is the knowledge that the Poe Museum exists. Here, the King and his works receive their just due, celebrated year-round as enthusiastically as they were frowned upon during his short lifetime.

Step into early 19th century Richmond at The Poe Museum, open from 10:00 am - 5:00 pm (EST), Tuesday - Saturday, and Sundays 11:00 am - 5:00 pm. Guided tours begin on the hour for an adult admission fee of $6 USD. Visit www.poemuseum.org for more info on the Museum, its Poe Young Writer's Conference, and having weddings in Poe's enchanted garden.





DINNER'S READY! THE GORE-MET

The Gore-met gleefully solemnizes Canadian transgressive cinema with Sazuma's new deluxe double bill of depravity containing Karim Hussain's *Subconscious Cruelty* as well as Mitch Davis' controversial short *Divided Into Zero*.

Transgressive cinema can be defined as a school of filmmaking that exceeds acceptable boundaries of taste and propriety, characterized by graphic depictions of violence, drug use and sexual deviance. Transgressive films are deliberately offensive expressions of alienation and social discontent. As a movement, it is the cinematic realization of the New York punk ethos of the late '70s, best summarized in the sex and gore shorts of Nick Zedd, Richard Kern and Lydia Lunch. As an ideology, it is the basis for the cynical cinema of José Mojica Marins (Coffin Joe), Jörg Buttgereit (*Nekromantik*), and Canadians Karim Hussain and (FanTasia Festival Director) Mitch Davis.

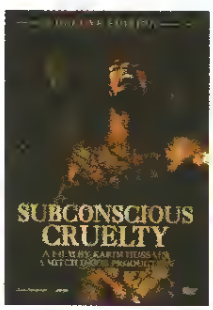


***Subconscious Cruelty**: An orgy of transgression.*

SUBCONSCIOUS CRUELTY (2000) DELUXE EDITION PAL DVD

Starring Brea Asher, Ivaylo Founev and Christopher Piggins
Written and directed by Karim Hussain
Sazuma Trading

Subconscious Cruelty is a Canadian cult film that would be the stuff of underground legend had the information age not killed that concept at the same time the film began to creep into the collective horror consciousness. Although rarely seen, it has nevertheless come to be regarded as one of the most disturbing films ever made – a blasphemous assault on religious repression and emotional constraints in conventional society, engineered to alienate and confound apathetic audiences. Good stuff, indeed.



Loosely described as an anthology, *Subconscious Cruelty* is a collection of esoteric sequences that lays waste to traditional narrative and thematic structure. It is a marriage of imagery and sound that gives birth to passion and reflection, and a thing of hideous and profound beauty. Backed by a stunning original soundtrack, the film slowly reveals itself.

The abdomen of a naked woman is slit open and an eyeball is removed from her ovaries, a man has a twisted obsession with a pregnant woman, and naked, mud-caked supplicants literally fuck the Earth before the final and most controversial segment.

Hussain's true target is the hypocrisy and shallowness of Christianity, which in one sequence is literally cooked up like smack and injected into the brain of a man who then witnesses the defilement of Christ. The Son of God is snatched, bleeding and begging before the ruins of an abandoned cathedral by three succubi that proceed to cannibalize, urinate upon and disembowel him before he's sodomized with a tree branch. It's a harrowing and powerful sequence that has been the source of the censorship issues the filmmakers have endured since the film was completed in 2000.

While it occasionally teeters at the precipice of pretentiousness and is imbued with a degree of twentysomething sexual angst, *Subconscious Cruelty* is an astounding and challenging film before which most will wither.

The second disc of this two-disc set features *Subconscious Cruelty* producer Mitch Davis' 1999 award-winning half-hour short *Divided Into Zero*, a mesmerizing document of 70 years in the life of a murderous paedophile. Like *Cruelty*, it eschews traditional narrative filmmaking technique, utilizing surreal imagery and sound design to express the very real horror of child murder. It's a haunting and melancholic companion to Hussain's film.

Sazuma Productions have compiled a beautiful, exhaustive two-disc set of the first uncensored DVD release of *Subconscious Cruelty*. The first disc contains a gorgeous Ultrabit transfer of *Cruelty* with full-frame and matted options, an introduction by the director and the original trailer. The second disc contains *Divided Into Zero*, as well as a 77-minute documentary on the six-and-a-half year production of *Cruelty*, text interviews, clips from other shorts by Davis, a short by Hussain, an unreleased audio track, a photo gallery, *Cruelty* comic and a fourteen-page booklet with an essay on this truly devastating feature.

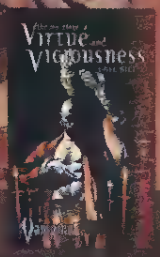


"Stolze's fluid writing seamlessly switches between fast-paced action and personal drama."
– Ex Libris Nocturnis

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THE MARRIAGE OF VIRTUE AND VICIOUSNESS
by Greg Stolze



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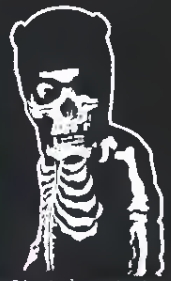
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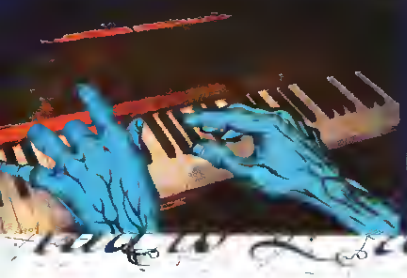
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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY DAVE ALEXANDER, KEITH CARMAN, TOMB DRAGOMIR AND AARON LUPTON.



ALONE IN THE DARK Soundtrack
Various
NUCLEAR BLAST
I can still remember when Dimmu Borgir, Dark Tranquility and Cradle of Filth were considered underground metal bands. Now they're being used to squeeze a few extra bucks out of Uwe Boll's latest big-budget disaster. This joint effort by metal mega-labels Nuclear Blast and Century Media throws together a whopping two discs and 36 tracks of thrash, death and hardcore, most of it coming from their own bands – all of it previously released on albums in the past two years, and none of it featured in the actual movie. Hey, I dig Dew-Scented and Suffocation too, but what's the point?
AL ☠☠



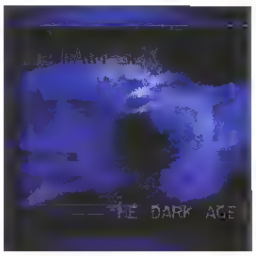
ELECTRIC FRANKENSTEIN Rock
Burn Bright, Burn Fast
TKO RECORDS
Unlike when you send your unreliable hunchback lab assistant to get you a brain, when you put on an Electric Frankenstein album, you know what you're getting. On the veteran Joisey band's 4729th or so release they deliver the expected gravely, twangy, high-energy, blues-touched rawk, ideal for loosening window panes at your local beer hole. They're at their most fun with the catchy Gone To The Other Room, the howling title track, and the ominous Cars cover Candy-O. And hell, if you hate the disc, whip it at Igor's useless, ugly head and marvel at that sweet Basil Gogos cover art.
DA ☠☠☠1/2



PITCH BLACK Rock
This Is the Modern Sound
REVELATION RECORDS
What in the Sam Hell happened to Pitch Black? Not too long ago Aaron Lupton was touting these guys as the best thing since sliced muscle, and they were featured on the Fiendforce Records' *This Is HorrorPunk* compilation, but beware, my fiends, horror punk this ain't. Mired in a pop-punk, emo-leaning sound you might not expect from a band featuring ex-Nerve Agent Kevin Cross, *This Is the Modern Sound* boasts rock-solid production, trumpety interludes, mod-style keys, and includes abstract songs about things like monkeys and statues, but ultimately comes off as Blink 182's tougher, been-there-done-that younger brother. If this really is the modern sound, I'm starting work on my time machine, like, yesterday. **TD DOA**



THE PHANTOM PAINS Punk Hardcore
In Bed With the Dead
(WWW.THISBLESSINGTHISCURSE.COM)
American Werewolves label-mates The Phantom Pains play it fast, loud and caustic like the Nerve Agents and Black Flag did once upon an angry time. Quick and dirty, most of the tracks on *In Bed With the Dead* clock in around a minute-and-a-half and the vocals sit in the back behind The Pains' loud 'n' pungent blasts of bass and '80s thrash guitar. There's little room for variation, and the horror ties are loose, but credit these creeps for shoveling six cuts and a bonus demo into a mere nineteen minutes. Plus, you can fold out the front cover so the girl on it bites into some guy's neck!
TD ☠☠☠1/2



THE FAIR SEX Industrial
The Dark Ages
VAN RICHTER RECORDS
When The Fair Sex saw their drummer drop dead on stage of a heart attack, vocalist Myk Jung and co. replaced him with a drum machine and now claim themselves to be the first German band to cross guitars with electronics



RUE MORGUE NOW PLAYING ON RADIO



SHADOW REICHENSTEIN Rock
Werewolf Order
FIENDFORCE RECORDS
Shadow Reichenstein's indie debut blew the gates off the Drome some four years ago (*RM#23*) so a big thanks to the good ghouls at Fiendforce for reanimating a monster rock corpse the late Gregorius Chant once dubbed the "soundtrack to our Afterlives." Equal parts haunted hot rod rock and balls-out Halloween camp, *Werewolf Order* raises the dead with Dracula (using a cowbell no less!), tears a strip from a beloved icon (Bella Was A Junkie) takes bittersweet death metal turns (Wakin' The Dead, Werewolf Order) and works weird whispers into a cool goth-styled ballad called In Search Of Dirt. Leading the pack of current death rock dog soldiers like Calabrese and The Death Riders, Shadow Reichenstein's *Werewolf Order* has us rippin', clawin' and yowlin' at the moon. Arrrooo! **TD** ☠☠☠☠☠

way back in the days of Pac-Man (and ironically, Spinal Tap). A two-disc best of/rarities anthology, *The Dark Ages* runs the strange range from unmemorable gothic industrial (Faceless) to cooler punk-electro cuts (Helpless Fall, Boredom Kills) with the odd cringe-worthy kick at electro dance (House Of Unkinds and a T. Rex cover spring pretty quickly to mind.) Cyberspace guitars, repetitive drum loops and awkward vocals from singer Myk Jung of Testify (who actually sounds a lot like the old Nivek Ogre here) makes *The Dark Ages* a scattering of hits. But the misses will bury you. **TD** ☠☠1/2



SYCKSYDE **Hip Hop**
White Crosses
(WWW.3SE.NET)
The Sycksyde crew of Bob E. Nite, Icepick Willie and Sinister X drop barbed rhymes on smooth beats, sampling the sounds of scraping hinges and stifled human shrieks. On *White Crosses*, their schizophrenic psycho-killer songs clock off with the superior Four Rooms (pilfered liberally from Carpenter's *Halloween* theme), and the creepy cut Can You Kill sounds like Cypress Hill hit a little too much a da chronic and wandered into a bad '80s slasher flick. Bloody Valentines mutates a romantic piano into rape-revenge ,stalker-with-an-ice pick territory, but you'll have to hack past a veritable brick wall of misogyny to get beyond gross jams Graveyard Shitt and Mr. Bygg Dyck, both much more knife-in-cheek than tongue-in-cheek. **TD** ☠☠☠



ECTO-1 **Punk Metal**
This Cold and Starving Dark
ANTIDOTE RECORDS
Subtitled "Anthems for the Morose and Misanthropic", *This Cold and Starving Dark* is a pretty serious sounding horror rock record for a band named after the car used in *Ghostbusters*. Fronted by Eerie Ln.'s gravel-voiced vokillist Boo Gruesome, Ecto create a dark, All Hallow's Eve atmosphere with distorted metal ditties full of moody melodies and punk ferocity. Imagine Eerie Ln. with some obvious Samhain/Danzig references and you're getting close. We get the feeling Ecto-1 were trying for a sound much bigger and better than what horror punk tends to be offering these days, but sadly, too much of *This Cold and Starving Dark* simply comes off as a lesser imitation of its goth rock influences. **AL** ☠☠1/2



DARK EDEN **Gothic Metal**
Rock Me Asmodeus
WWW.DARKEDEN.ORG
Gotham City's Dark Eden summons nine dark metal spells in the shadows of Slayer on *Rock Me Asmodeus* (referring to Hell's noted demon of lusty human desires). With grinding "death metal" that endeavors to break from the black code, the band includes a lascivious industrial cut (Possession) and a track that sounds a heck of a lot like Joy Division (God's Little Mistakes). In addition, the eerie Genesis 37:40 is a godless nursery knell which pretty much soaks a sackful of Julie Andrews' Favourite Things in gas then sends them straight to H-E-Double-Hockey-Sticks in a blaze of metallic cinder. Diverse, independent, goth-kissed heavy metal. Who'da thunk it? **TD** ☠☠☠☠



VLADIMIRS **Metal**
The Odds Are Against Us...
BLOODANDGUTS
What a prophetic album title. Despite bloody, goriffic lyrical content on tracks like Her Black Hearse and Obscene Act Of Passion, or venomous riffing on Desolation Angels, The Vladimirs need to get over their identity crisis: too many cooks, man. Vocals are delivered in a Michael Graves-era Misfits (well, more like Jerry Only trying to be Graves) romantic crooning sort of way that's unique but not entirely fitting with the slightly metallic, albeit typical, four-chord punk buried underneath. The end result is moderately saccharin metal that shifts between almost creepy and just fucking grating. Factor in a mix that gives this record a karaoke feel and one can see how the odds are indeed against the Vladimirs.
KC ☠☠



ALL SHALL PERISH **Metal**
Hate. Malice. Revenge
NUCLEAR BLAST
The reissue of Bay Area death metal fiends All Shall Pensh's 2003 debut effort, *Hate. Malice. Revenge* is even more poignant two years after it first obliterated listeners with its malicious lyrical content ("Your actions soaked in blood/Just like the doctrine that you preach every day/Fuck your indoctrination") that revolves around the condemnation of man's inhumanity against man. Occasionally their standpoint feels more from the victim than the culprit, which is interesting, especially when the band infuses cryptic pseudo-black metal imagery into the fold. Sonically and tonally this rivals the ferocity of Brujeria, the vocal mayhem of Dying Fetus and the low-end, ball-shaking rumble of Mortician. Not bad names to drop on any metal day. **KC** ☠☠☠

RUE MORGUE NOW PLAYING ON RADIO

GEIN AND THE GRAVEROBBERS **Surf**
The Passion of the Anti-Christ
NECRO-TONE RECORDS
It's been two long years since their creepy, low-fi instrumental spook surf last haunted the Audio Drome, but thank the dark lord they're back: Satan's favourite surf band themselves, Gein And The Graverobbers. This time the grisly gore-tet shies a tad away from their trademark B-movie gospel for a thicker sounding production, and big-time focus on aggression. I know it sounds crazy, but much of the appropriately titled *Passion of the Anti-Christ* actually sounds like surf covers of Iron Maiden and Slayer, with its intricate guitar noodling and pounding breakdowns – all drenched in bloody reverb and ice-cold ambience. Summer's here kiddies, so pick this baby up (along with your axe and surfboard) and bring the horror back to the beach party. **AL** ☠☠☠☠☠



AUDIO DROME

Danish psychobilly KIM NEKROMAN discusses the influence of horror on his band NEKROMANTIX, just prior to Hellcat's North American reissue of their most sought-after, sold-out record: Brought Back to Life.

RETURN OF THE LOVING DEAD

BY JOVANKA VUCKOVIC

What do zombies, coffins, gargoyles, cannibals, deed cheerleaders, *Nosferatu*, the wolfman, Elvis Presley, Jörg Buttgereit, rockabilly, punk rock and a walking bass line that purrs like a hot rod fueled by formaldehyde have in common? They're all essential components of the mad musical monster that is Nekromantix: three mega-quiffed psychobillies from Denmark who burst out of their graves in 1989, bringing with them music from beyond that combined an obsession with horror culture, the '50s aesthetic of rockabilly Americana, and the '70s sensibility and aggression of British punk rock. The result was a unique brand of horror-driven psychobilly, sometimes dubbed "necrobilly" because of its relentless tendency toward morbidity.



"All of our songs are horror-related somehow because that's how I like to write them," lead singer and coffin-bass grinder Kim Nekroman told *Rue Morgue* backstage at a recent gig by the HorrorPops, a more trendy, popabilly-ska side project he started with his wife Patricia Day back in 1996 that includes former Tiger Army (*RM#31*) member Geoff Kresge. "I have loved horror movies since I was a kid, my first exposure to them was the good old silent movies – *Frankenstein*, *Nosferatu*, *King Kong*. I later became a fan of [European directors] Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci and the like and I saw a German film called *Nekromantik*, and I loved it so much, it inspired the name of the band."

Though they certainly weren't the first psychobillies to celebrate horror in their music – American progenitors like The Cramps and The Meteors, as well as bands that followed like Demented Are Go! and Batmobile, led the way in the early '80s – Nekromantix quickly became among the most popular of the ghoulish lot despite the fact that the majority of their records were produced independently overseas with little to no advertising at all. A small but vital North American movement of undead hipsters sang their foreign praises and gladly paid through the nose for Danish imports, a fact which eventually encouraged Nekroman to move to the United States in 2002, leaving members Peter and Kristian Sandorff behind.

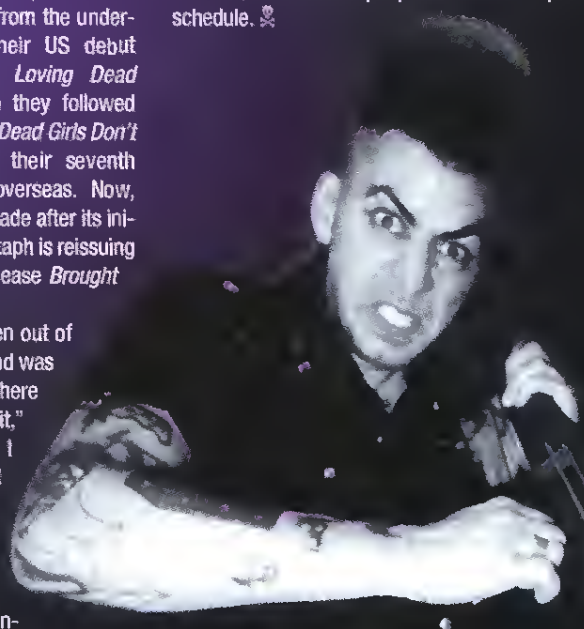
That year, Nekromantix effectively brought European horror psychobilly out from the underground with their US debut *Return of the Loving Dead* (*RM#30*), which they followed up in 2004 with *Dead Girls Don't Cry* (*RM#39*) – their seventh studio album overseas. Now, more than a decade after its initial European release, Hellcat/Epitaph is reissuing the band's hard-to-find 1994 release *Brought Back to Life*.

"*Brought Back to Life* has been out of print for almost five years now and was never available in the US, so there has been a great demand for it," explains Nekroman. "Since I owned the rights to the record I thought I'd give something back to the North American fans who supported us along the way."

And what a reward we reap; *Brought Back to Life*, which contains a live video, restored original intro, and alternate versions of two songs, celebrates horror in the way only Nekromantix can – with lots and lots of dead things. Song subjects include a summer camp massacre (Bloody Holiday), zombies (Back From The Grave), dead girls (Nekrofelia), reincarnated witches burned at the stake (Reincarnated Love), demented dentists (Driller Killer), Universal Monsters (Monster Movie Fan), semen-squirting flashers (Jack The Stripper) and, of course, an eternity in Hell (Dial 666).

"The old ones are the best," says Nekroman of his band's love of fright flicks. "Nowadays, horror films tend to be a little too special effects-driven for my taste. I can't really explain why I love those old movies so much. Like you, it's just natural to me."

Nekromantix are currently on a North American tour, check www.epitaph.com for a complete schedule.



PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS PLAYABILITY SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS OUT OF OF THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



AREA-51

PS2 | XBox

Midway

Those pesky, splice-happy scientists in Area-51 were fiddling with DNA again, attempting to make an alien/human hybrid, when an infectious E.T. escaped and all hell broke loose. As Ethan Cole, a HAZMAT team member who doesn't believe in "little green men" (get ready for a big surprise, buddy) your mission is to descend into the bowels of the base and administer an extraterrestrial turdkicking.

Armed with prerequisite grunt hardware like shotguns and assault rifles, you explore *Area-51*'s beautifully-rendered levels, where you're attacked at every turn by mutated scientists, zombified soldiers and cloned hybrid creatures. These monsters have lost most of their humanity but not their weaponry skills, they can fillet you with standard firearms or tear you apart with their talons.

Though it sounds and plays a lot like *Doom 3*, *Area-51* raises the stakes and diverges from other FPSs because, as Cole, you can be infected with the alien virus. This adds a new dimension to the game by enabling you to flip back and forth between human and alien fighting abilities (like launching gut-munching parasites at your opponent).

The fright factor is also raised each level because an increasing number of the hideous hybrids attack as you scramble against the clock to find the antidote for the virus. The coup de grâce of this wonderfully moody, claustrophobic and at times outright terrifying game, is the voice talent; David Duchovny is Cole and Marilyn Manson voices the head alien. *Area-51* is pulse-pounding fun, even without a probing level!







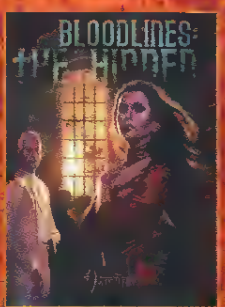
DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL

PC Expansion Pack

id Software

Shadowing the sickly sweet success of its predecessor, the first PC expansion pack for *Doom 3* delivers the red stuff by the putrid, overflowing bucket, and keeps you in a white-knuckle world of terror where every move could be your last. The fiendish game designers kept the frenetic pace and hyper realism of the first outing and crammed in twelve new levels oozing with repugnant maggots, fetid Hell Knights and a fresh slew of beasties raring to rip you a new one.

Combat has taken a much-needed departure from claustrophobic steel corridors into tech labs and archaeological sites where creatures called Vulgars puke green shit at your character, Linda Blair-style. Plus, your Marine now has an ancient artifact that enables fun abilities like one-punch kills. Combine that with some sweet new weapons (like "The Grabber", which lets you toss heavy objects) and you've got yourself one hell of a plasma party.



BLOODLINES: THE HIDDEN

RPG Sourcebook

White Wolf Game Studio

Roll up your sleeve and tap that vein for yet another trip into the world of role-playing darkness that is *Vampire: The Requiem*, but be careful: mixing old and new blood is never easy. White Wolf's latest, *The Hidden*, is a sourcebook for diehard vampire RPG players that locks teeth with *Requiem* to expand that game's universe. Its beautifully illustrated pages introduce twelve offshoot mutant bloodlines (that the established vampire clans generally want destroyed), and details them, listing abilities, loyalties and weaknesses that play into their desperate bid to find a place alongside the Kindred.

Based on the idea that vampire blood can morph under extreme circumstances, existing characters can also be reforged. This twists storylines into unusual directions that aren't for the faint of heart or the novice gamer; integrating these new elements is challenging. Just picture that red-headed cousin of yours with fangs and a cape. It ain't pretty.


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Classic Cut

Presents

SATURN DEVOURING HIS CHILDREN



Spain – 1820 - 1823
by Francisco Jose de Goya
Fresco (oil on plaster), 146 cm x 83 cm
Museo del Prado, Madrid

Before films could speak, they told us their stories in silence. Before pictures could move, they told us their stories through stillness. And before images could be captured in emulsion, they were rendered on canvas. Being an indelible part of the human experience, horror has often been a great inspiration for all mediums, not the least of which is paintings – the need to explore violence, morbidity, fear and anxiety has been a cathartic necessity since day one.

When it comes to the canvas, few have left us with images as horrific, disturbing and lingering as 19th century Spanish painter Francisco Jose de Goya (1746-1828). His graphic portrayals of war, caustic depictions of human folly and unsettling, otherworldly renderings of witches and their craft have reached beyond his time and influenced the work of artisans throughout the ages, including horror film contemporaries like Spanish native Paul Naschy (*RM#46*), Mexican fantasist Guillermo del Toro (*RM#24*) and English artist/writer/director Clive Barker (*RM#41*), to name a few.

Born in 1746, Goya's career as an artist began when he was just thirteen. By his mid-20s he found himself painting church frescoes and was eventually called upon by the Spanish crown, for which he painted esteemed portraits. But a mysterious, unknown illness (documented in his *Self-Portrait With Dr. Arrieta*) befell him at the peak of his popularity with the noble crowd. Paralysis and blindness were temporary, but deafness was absolute.

Goya's illness alienated him from the pomp and pageantry of royal life and a dark, often profane, streak began to appear in his work. Some of his creations, like the 80 etchings that are collected in the book *Los Caprichos* (Courier Dover Publications, 1969) that depicted 18th century Spain as a nation of grotesque monsters, were so gloomy, that they were forced off the market by the Spanish government.

Goya's most well-known and arguably darkest work, however, remains *Saturno devorando a su hijo* (variously translated over the years as *Saturn Devouring His Children*, *Saturn Devours His Children*, *Saturn Devouring One Of His Children*, *Saturn Devouring One Of His Sons* or, simply, *Saturn*). Based on a much more benign 1686 painting by Peter Paul Rubens (which in turn was based on the earliest version of the Kronos myth, a Roman legend of the jealous Saturn devouring his perspicacious progeny lest they usurp him), Goya's *Saturn* is largely regarded as the most horrific painting in all of Western art and an ultimate image of cannibalistic horror.

Stripped of the story's mythology or any morality, the painting could almost function as the exploitation movie of its day; it features a naked, fierce savage of a man with mad eyes lilting out of a blotchy, coal-hued darkness, his massive rust-coloured hands clutching the sundered, mutilated, headless corpse of another human being from which he eats. His hideous mouth is open wide and wild, a bloody limb gnawed off to the elbow hangs inches from his lips. Not since his *Los desastres de la guerra* (*The Disasters of War*) series – with the grisly *Esto es peor* (*This is Worse*) featuring a mutilated corpse impaled on a tree – had Goya created something so gruesome.

To gaze upon the image of a cannibal god on his knees consuming his own child evokes a sense of nightmarish internal terror that is difficult to shake, which is likely why a similar image adorns the Go Video cover of Ruggiero Deodato's exploitive gorefest *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980). Although subtle, the likeness is evident in the gaping character of the figure's mouth, the beady stare of the eyes, the disheveled hair and, most tellingly, the positioning of the gruesome remains.

Unlike Deodato's film, nobody really knows why Goya painted *Saturn*. Its name was given by art historians, who also figure the painting is a satirical retelling of Rubens' piece. We do know that it was executed as part of a series of fourteen (as they are now called) *Black Paintings* that Goya rendered when he was 72 – then deaf for 26 long years – with equal parts oil and cynicism on the plaster walls of Quinta del Sordo (a country house for the deaf where Goya hid out during his last years). Whatever the impetus was that drove him to render this unforgettable image, *Saturn* remains as compelling, repulsive, tenebrous and startling as it did 185 years ago.

Paul Carlucci

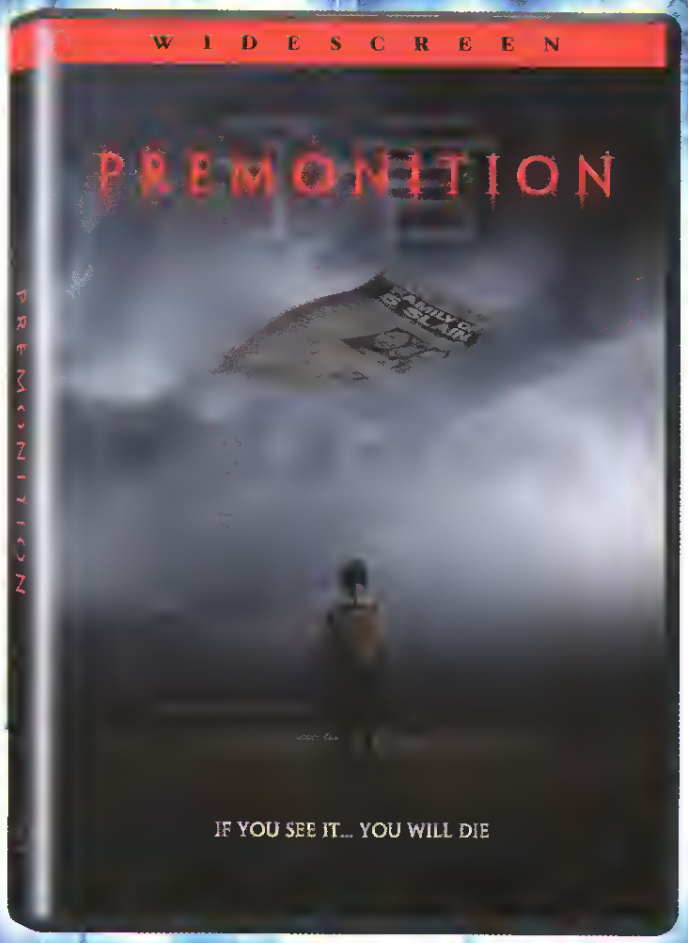


Saturn Devouring His Children: *Goya's grisly image of cannibalistic horror.*

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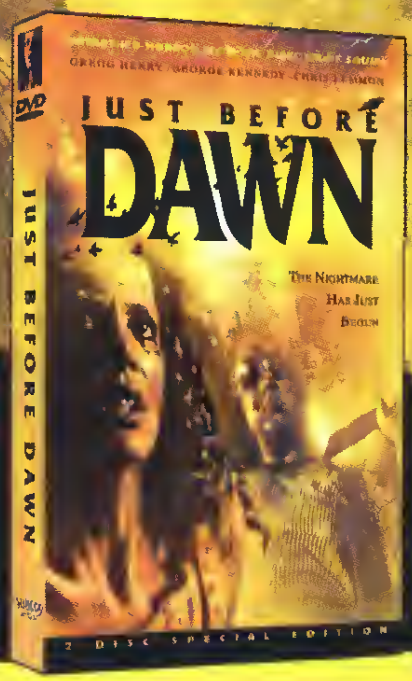
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